MYTHS AND FABLES OF TO-DAY

S. A. DRAKE

INDIANA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The CELLAR BOOK SHOP
Box 6, College Park Sta.
Detroit 21, Mich. -U.S.A.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Watch Fires of '76	Illustrated	$1.25
The Campaign of Trenton	. . . . .	.50
Burgoyne's Invasion of 1777	. . . . .	.50
The Taking of Louisburg	. . . . .	.50
The Battle of Gettysburg	. . . . .	.50
Our Colonial Homes	Illustrated	2.50
Old Landmarks of Boston	Illustrated	2.00
Old Landmarks of Middlesex	Illustrated . .	2.00
Captain Nelson	A romance of Colonial Days .	.75
The Heart of the White Mountains	Illustra'd	7.50
The Same	Tourists' Edition	3.00
Old Boston Taverns	Paper	.25
Around the Hub	A Boys' Book about Boston .	1.12
New England Legends and Folk Lore	Illus'd	2.00
The Making of New England	Illustrated . .	1.50
The Making of the Great West	Illustrated .	1.50
The Making of Virginia and Middle Colonies	.	1.50
The Making of the Ohio Valley States	Ill'd	1.50
The Pine Tree Coast	Illustrated	1.50

Any book in the above list sent by mail, postpaid, on receipt of price, by

LEE AND SHEPARD BOSTON MASS.

THE MYTHS AND FABLES OF TO-DAY

"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Indiana University

http://www.archive.org/details/mythsfablesoftod02drak

HALLOWE'EN.

THE MYTHS AND FABLES OF TO-DAY

By

Samuel Adams Drake

Illustrations by

Frank T. Merrill

BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD
MCM

47

BF 1429
.D7
Copy 2

Copyright, 1900, by Samuel Adams Drake.

All rights reserved.

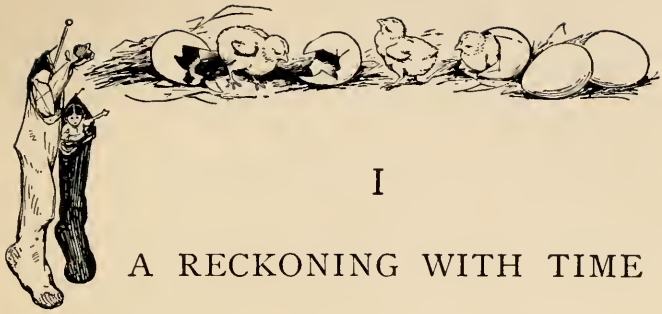
The Myths and Fables of To-day.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	A Reckoning with Time	1
II.	The Folk-lore of Childhood	25
III.	Weather Lore	34
IV.	Signs of All Sorts	47
V.	Charms to Good Luck	55
VI.	Charms against Disease	85
VII.	Of Fate in Jewels	109
VIII.	Of Love and Marriage	122
IX.	Of Evil Omens	144
X.	Of Haunted Houses, Persons, and Places	182
XI.	Of Presentiments	208
XII.	The Divining-rod	229
XIII.	Wonders of the Physical Universe	234
XIV.	"Ships that Pass in the Night"	244
XV.	Fortune-telling, Astrology, and Palmistry	259



I

A RECKONING WITH TIME

"Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious."

TO say that superstition is one of the facts of history is only to state a truism. If that were all, we might treat the subject from a purely philosophical or historical point of view, as one of the inexplicable phenomena of an age much lower in intelligence than our own, and there leave it.

But if, also, we must admit superstition to be a present, a living, fact, influencing, if not controlling, the everyday acts of men, we have to deal with a problem as yet unsolved, if not insolvable.

I know it is commonly said that such things belong to a past age — that they were the legitimate product of ignorance, and have died out

with the education of the masses. In other words, we know more than our ancestors did about the phenomena of nature, and therefore by no means accept, as they did — good, superstitious souls! — the appearance of a comet blazing in the heavens, or the heaving of an earthquake under our feet, as events having moral significance. With the aid of electricity or steam we perform miracles every day of our lives, such as, no doubt, would have created equal wonder and fear for the general stability of the world not many generations ago.

Very true. So far as merely physical phenomena are concerned, most of us may have schooled ourselves to disunite them wholly from coming events; but as regards those things which spring from the inward consciousness of the man himself, his intuitions, his perceptions, his aspirations, his imaginative nature, which, if strong enough, is capable of creating and peopling a realm wholly outside of the little world he lives in — "ay, there's the rub." Who will undertake to span the gulf stretching out a

shoreless void between the revelations of science and the incomprehensible mysteries of life itself? It is upon that debatable ground that superstition finds its strongest foothold, and, like the ivy clinging round old walls, defies every attempt to uproot it. As Hamlet so cogently puts it, —

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Superstition, we know, is much older than recorded history, and we now stand on the threshold of the twentieth century; yet just in proportion as humanity has passed over this enormous space of time, hand in hand with progress, superstition has followed it like its shadow. That shadow has not yet passed away.

There is no sort of use in denying the proneness of weak human nature to admit superstition. It is an open door, through which the marvellous finds easy access. Imbibed in the cradle, it is not even buried in the grave. "Age cannot stale, nor custom wither" those ancient

fables of ghosts, giants, goblins, and brownies told by fond mothers to children to-day, just as they were told by mothers centuries ago. Even the innocent looking Easter egg, which continues to enjoy such unbounded popularity with old and young, comes of an old Aryan myth; while the hanging up of one's stocking, at Christmas, is neither more nor less than an act of superstition, originating in another myth; or, in plain English, no Santa Claus, no stocking.

How much of childhood's charm in the greatest of all annual festivals, the world over, would remain if Santa Claus, Kris Kringle, and St. Nicholas were stripped of their traditional, but wholly fictitious, character? One of our popular magazines for children — long life to it! — flourishes under the title of St. Nicholas to-day; and during the very latest observance of the time-honored festival, a leading journal in New England's chief city devoted considerable space in its editorial columns to an elaborate defence of that dear old myth

Santa Claus, with whom, indeed, we should be very loth to part, if only for the sake of old associations.

It is also noticed that quite recently stories of the wonderful brownies have enjoyed their greatest popularity. For a time these spindle-shanked, goggle-eyed puppets could be seen in every household, in picture-books, on book-covers, in the newspapers — in short, everywhere. Should the children be told that there never were any such creatures as fairies or brownies, there would be an end to all the charm they possess; for, unquestionably, their only hold upon the popular mind rests upon the association with olden superstition. Otherwise they would be only so many commonplace rag dolls.

Kipling's popular "Jungle Stories," probably more widely read than any stories of the century, give still further effect to the same idea.

Now, is not the plea that these are mere harmless nothings by far the most short-sighted one that could be advanced? The critical

thought to be impressed here is that about the first teaching little children receive is a lesson in superstition, and that, too, at a time when their young minds are most susceptible to lasting impressions. We have yet to hear of the mother, nursery-maid, or governess, who begins the story of Cinderella or Bluebeard with the warning that it is not "a real true story," as children say.

Are children of a larger growth any less receptive to the marvellous? "Great oaks from little acorns grow." The seed first planted in virgin soil later bears an abundant harvest. Stage plays, operas, poetry, romances, painting, and sculpture dealing with the supernatural command quite as great a popularity, to-day, as ever. Fortune telling, palmistry, astrology, clairvoyance, hypnotism, and the rest, continue to thrive either as a means of getting a living, or of innocent diversion, leaving their mark upon the inner consciousness just the same in one case as in the other.

So much being undeniable, it stands with every honest inquirer after truth to look these

facts in the face without blinking. Ignorance we dare not plead. The dictates of a sound common sense will not permit us to dismiss what we do not understand with a laugh, a shrug, or a sneer. "To scold is not to answer."

Superstition is not easily defined. To say that it is a disposition to believe more than is warranted by reason, leaves us just as helpless as ever; for where reason is impotent we have nothing tangible left to fall back upon. There is absolutely no support on which to rest that lever. Religion and philosophy, which at first fostered superstition, long ago turned against it all the forces they possessed. Not even science may hope to overthrow what can only be reached through the inner consciousness of man, because science can have little to do with the spiritual side of man. That intangible something still eludes its grasp. If all these combined forces of civilization have so far signally failed to eradicate superstition, so much the worse for civilization.

We might also refer to the efforts of some

very erudite scholars to interpret modern superstition by the aid of comparative mythology. Vastly interesting, if not wholly convincing, theories have been constructed on this line. Instructive, too, is the fact that some of our most familiar nursery stories may be traced to the ancient folk-lore of still older peoples. Even a remote antiquity is claimed for the familiar nursery tale of "Jack and Jill"; while something very similar to the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" is found, in its purity, in the grewsome werewolf folk-lore of Germany; and "Jonah's Gourd," of the East, we are told, probably is the original of "Jack and the Beanstalk" of the West.

But the very fact of the survival of all these hoary superstitions, some of them going back so far that all further trace is lost, certainly furnishes food for thought, since they seemingly enjoy as great a popularity as ever.

Superstition being thus shown to be as old as human history, the question naturally arises, not how it may have originated in the Dark Ages,

but how it has kept its hold so tenaciously throughout all the succeeding centuries down to our own time.

Most peoples, barbarians even, believed in some sort of a future state, in the principle of good and evil, and of rewards and punishments. There needs no argument then to account for the insatiable longing to pry into futurity, and to discover its hidden mysteries. The same idea unsettled the minds of former generations, nor can it be truthfully said to have disappeared before the vaunted wisdom of this utilitarian age. Like all forbidden fruit, this may be said to be the subject of greatest anxiety to weak human kind.

What then is this talisman with the aid of which we strive to penetrate the secrets of the world beyond us?

Man being what he is, only "a little lower than the angels," endowed with the supernatural power of calling up at will mental images of both the living and the dead, of building air-castles, and peopling them according to his

fantasy, as well in Cathay as in Spain, of standing by the side of an absent friend on the summit of Mont Blanc, one moment among the snows, the next flitting through the garden spots of sunny Italy — if he is thus capable of transporting himself into an enchanted land by the mere exercise of the power of his imagination — what could better serve him as a medium of communication with the unknown, and what shall deter him from seeking to fathom its deepest mysteries? Napoleon said truly that the imagination governs the universe. Every one has painted his own picture of heaven and hell as well as Dante or Milton, or the divine mysteries as truly as Leonardo or Murillo. Surely, the imagination could go no further.

Assuming this to be true, there is little need to ask why, in this enlightened age, the attempt should be made to revive vagaries already decrepit, that would much better be allowed to go out with the departed century, unhonored and unsung. Such a question could proceed only from a want of knowledge of the true facts in the case.

But whether superstition is justified by the dictates of a sound common sense, is not so material here, as whether it actually does exist; and if so, to what extent. That is what we shall try to make clear in the succeeding pages. The inquiry grows interesting in many ways, but most of all, we think, as showing the slow stages by which the human mind has enfranchised itself from a species of slavery, without its counterpart in any direction to which we may turn for help or guidance. Even science, that great leveller of popular error, limps here. Certainly, what has existed as long as human history must be accepted as a more or less active force in human affairs. We are not, therefore, dealing with futilities.

Of the present status of superstition, the most that can be truthfully said is that some of its worst forms are nearly or quite extinct, some are apparently on the wane, while those representing, perhaps, the widest extremes (the most puerile and the most vital), such, for example, as relate to vapid tea-table gossip on the one

hand, and to fatal presentiments on the other, continue quite as active as ever. Uncivilized beings are now supposed to be the only ones who still hold to the belief in witchcraft, although within a very few months it has been currently reported as a fact that the judge of a certain Colorado court admitted the plea of witchcraft to be set up, because, as this learned judge shrewdly argued, more than half the people there believed in it. The defendant, who stood charged with committing a murderous assault upon a woman, swore that she had bewitched him, and was acquitted by the jury, mainly upon his own testimony.

Unquestionably modern hypnotism comes very close to solving the problem of olden witchcraft, which so baffled the wisdom, as it tormented the souls and bodies, of our ancestors, with this difference: that, while witchcraft was believed to be a power to work evil, coming direct from his Satanic Majesty himself, hypnotism is a power or gift residing in the individual, like that of mesmerism.

But if it be true that there are very few believers in witchcraft among enlightened beings to-day, it cannot be denied that thousands of highly civilized men and women as firmly believe in some indefinable relation between man and the spirit world as in their own existence; while tens of thousands believe in such a relation between mind and mind. Indeed, the former class counts some very notable persons among its converts. For example, Camille Flammarion, the distinguished scientist, positively declares that he has had direct communication with hundreds of departed spirits.[1] And the Reverend M. J. Savage, pastor of the Church of the Messiah, in New York, is reported to have announced himself a convert to spiritualism to his congregation not long ago.

The true explanation for all these different beliefs must be sought for, we think, deep down in the nature of man, which is much the same to-day in its relation to the supernatural world as it was in the days of our

[1] "L'Inconnu et les Problems Psychiques."

fathers of bigoted memory. In reality, the supernatural element exists to a greater or less degree in all of us, and no merely human agency can pretend to fix its limits.

Unquestionably, then, those beliefs which have exerted so potent an influence in the past over the minds or affairs of men, which continue to exert such influence to-day, and, for ought we know to the contrary, may extend that influence indefinitely, are not to be whistled down the wind, or kept hidden away under lock and key, especially when we reflect that the most terrible examples of the frailty of all human judgments concerning these beliefs have utterly failed to remove the groundwork upon which they rest.

There still remains the sentimental side of superstition to consider. What, for example, would become of much of our best literature, if all those apt and beautiful figures culled from the rich stores of ancient mythology — the very flowers of history, so to speak — were to be weeded out of it with unsparing hand? What

would Greek and Roman history be with their gods and goddesses left out? With what loving and appreciative art our greatest poets have gathered up the scattered legends of the fading past. Some one has cunningly said that superstition is the poetry of life, and that of all men poets should be superstitious.

As a matter of history, it is well known that our Puritan ancestors came over here filled full of the prevalent superstitions of the old country; yet even they had waged uncompromising warfare against all such ceremonious observances as could be traced back to heathen mythology. Thus, although they cut down May-poles, they had too much reverence for the Bible to refuse to believe in witches. Writers like Mr. Hawthorne have supposed that the wild and extravagant mysteries of their savage neighbors, may, to some extent, have become incorporated with their own beliefs. However that may be, it is certain that the Puritan fathers believed in no end of pregnant omens, also in ghosts, apparitions, and witches,

as well as in a personal devil, with whom, indeed, later on, they had no end of trouble. In short, if anything happened out of the common, the devil was in it. So say many to-day.

A certain amount of odium has attached itself to the Puritan fathers of New England, on this account, among unreflecting or ill-natured critics at least, just as if, upon leaving Old England, those people would be expected to leave their superstitions behind them, like so much useless luggage. As a matter of fact, rank superstition was the common inheritance of all peoples of that day and generation, whether Jew or Gentile, Frenchman or Dutchman, Virginian or New Englander. Of its wide prevalence in Old England we find ample proof ready to our hand. For example:

"At Boston, in Lincolnshire, Mr. Cotton being their former minister, when he was gone the bishop desired to have organs set up in the church, but the parish was unwilling to yield; but, however, the bishop prevailed to be at the cost to set them up. But

they being newly up (not playing very often with them) a violent storm came in at one window and blew the organs to another window, and brake both organs and window down, and to this day the window is out of reputation, being boarded and not glazed." [1]

Still further to show the feeling prevailing in England toward superstition at the time of the settlement of this country, in the historical essay entitled "With the King at Oxford," we find this anecdote: The King (Charles I.), coming into the Bodleian Library on a certain day, was shown a very curious copy of Virgil. Lord Falkland persuaded his Majesty to make trial of his fortune by thrusting a knife between the leaves, then opening the book at the place in which the knife was inserted. The king there read as follows: —

"Yet let him vexed bee with arms and warres of people wilde,
And hunted out from place to place, an outlaw still exylde:

[1] Wallington, "Historical Notices, Reign of Charles I."

Let him go beg for helpe, and from his childe dissevered bee,
And death and slaughter vile of all his kindred let him see."

The narrative goes on to say that the king's majesty was "much discomposed" by this uncanny incident, and that Lord Falkland, in order to turn the king's thoughts away from brooding over it, proposed making the trial himself.

We continue to draw irrefragable testimony to the truth of our position from the highest personages in the realm. Again, according to Wallington, Archbishop Laud, arch persecutor of the Puritans, has this passage in his diary: "That on such or such a day of the month he was made archbishop of Canterbury, and on that day, which was a great day of honor to him, his coach and horses sunk as they came over the ferry at Lambeth, in the ferry-boat, and he prayed that this might be no ill omen."

Our pious ancestors put a good deal of

faith in so-called "judgments," or direct manifestations of the divine wrath toward evil-doers, as all readers of Mather's "Remarkable Providences" well know. But they were by no means alone in such beliefs. It is related of the poet Milton, after he became blind, that the Duke of York (later James II.) asked him if he did not consider the loss of his eyesight as a judgment inflicted upon him for what he had written of the late king. In reply Milton asked the duke, if such afflictions were to be regarded as judgments from heaven, in what manner he would account for the fate of the late king; . . . he, the speaker, had only lost his eye, while the king had lost his head."

John Josselyn, Gent., an Englishman, but no Puritan, who spent some time in New England, chiefly at Scarborough in Maine, published, in 1672, in England, a little book under the title of "New England's Rarities Discovered." Some things which Josselyn "discovered" would be rarities indeed to this generation. For instance, he

describes the appearance of several prodigious apparitions — all of which has a value in enabling us properly to gauge the tone and temper of popular feeling where the book was written, and where it was published. One of his "rarities" is worth repeating here, if only for the pretty sentiment it embodies. He says of the twittering chimney-swallows, "that when about to migrate they commonly throw down (the chimney) one of their young into the room below, by way of gratitude," presumably in return for the hospitalities of the house. He then goes on to say, "I have more than once observed that, against the ruin of a family, these birds will forsake the house and come no more." This comes from a more or less close observer, who himself occupied the relation we desire to establish, namely that of a transplanted Englishman, so thoroughly grounded in old superstition that all the marvels he relates are told with an air of truth quite refreshing.

An amusing instance of how far prevalent superstition can lead astray minds usually en-

lightened is soberly set forth in Governor Winthrop's celebrated history. It is a fit corollary to the organ superstition, just narrated.

" Mr. Winthrop the younger, one of the magistrates, having many books in a chamber, where there was corn of divers sorts, had among them one wherein the Greek Testament, the Psalter and the Common Prayer were bound together. He found the Common Prayer eaten with mice, every leaf of it, and not any of the two other touched, nor any other of his books, though there were above a thousand."

All these superstitious beliefs were solemnly bequeathed by the fathers to their children under the sanction of a severe penal code, together with all the accumulated traditions of their own immediate ancestors. And in some form or other, whether masquerading under some thin disguise or foolish notion, superstition has continued from that day to this. As Polonius says:

> " . . . 'Tis true, 'tis pity;
> And pity 'tis 'tis true."

Although a great many popular beliefs may

seem puerile in the extreme, they none the less go to establish the fact to be kept in mind. Since I began to look into the matter I have been most astonished at the number of very intelligent persons who take care to conform to prevailing beliefs in things lucky or the reverse. It is true Lord Bacon tells us that "in all superstitions wise men follow fools." But this blunt declaration of his has undoubted reference to the schoolmen, and to the monastic legends which were such powerful aids in fostering the growth of superstition as it existed long before Bacon's time: —

> "A bone from a saintly anchorite's cave,
> A vial of earth from a martyr's grave."

The class of persons just spoken of, is, however, so keenly sensitive to ridicule that only some chance remark betrays their real mental attitude.

With the unlettered it is different. Superstition is so much more prevalent among them that less effort is made at concealment. Perhaps the many agencies at work to put it down

have not had so fair a trial in the country as in the city. And yet the recent "Lucky-Box" craze makes it difficult to draw the line. Be that as it may, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that some rural communities in New England are simply honeycombed with it. Indeed, almost every insignificant happening is a sign of something or other.

One result of my own observation in this field of research is, that women, if not by nature more superstitious than men, hold to these old beliefs much more tenaciously than men. In the country, it is the woman who is ready to quarrel with you, if, in some unguarded moment, you should venture to doubt the potency of her manifold signs. In the city, it is still the woman who presents her husband with some charm or other to be worn on his watch-chain, as a safeguard against disease, inconstancy, late hours, or other uncounted happenings of life, believing, as she does, more or less implicitly, in its traditional efficacy. In all that relates to marriage, too, women are

usually most careful how they disregard any of the accepted dicta on a subject of so much concern to their future happiness, as will appear later on.

Fifty years ago the poet Whittier declared that "There is scarcely a superstition of the past three centuries which has not, at this very time, more or less hold upon individual minds among us." The broad declaration demands less qualification to-day than is generally supposed.

Most of the examples collected in this volume have come under my own observation; some have been contributed by friends, many by the newspapers. If their number should prove a surprise to anybody, I can only say that mine has fully equalled their own. But let us, at least, be honest about it. We can conceal nothing from ourselves. Silence may be golden, but it makes no converts.

II

THE FOLK-LORE OF CHILDHOOD

"Why this is the best fooling when all is done." — *Twelfth Night.*

THE trite saying that "children and fools are soothsayers" goes straight to the heart of those familiar superstitions with which the folk-lore of childhood abounds. We, the children of a larger growth, often call to mind with what avidity we listened in our childhood's days to the nursery tales of giants, dwarfs, ghosts, fairies, and the like creations of pure fancy. We still remember how instantly all the emotions of our childish nature were excited by the recital of these marvels — told us, too, with such an air of truth, that never for a moment did we doubt them. Oh, how we

hated Blue Beard, and how we adored Jack the Giant-Killer! Are we not treated, just as soon as we are out of the cradle, as if superstition was the first law of nature? What is the wonder, then, that the effects of these early impressions are not easily got rid of, or the impressions themselves soon, if ever, forgotten? "Brownie" is put into the arms of toddling infants before they can articulate two words plainly. Just as soon as the child is able to prattle a little, it is taught the familiar nursery rhyme of

"Bye, bye, Baby Bunting,
Papa's gone a-hunting,"

drawn from ancient folk-lore, with which the rabbit and hare are so intimately associated. After the innocent face rhymes, found with little variation, in no less than four different languages, giving names to each of the chubby little features, —

"Eyes winker, Tom Tinker," etc.

come the well-known button rhymes, like this:

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief,
Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief;"

or this one, told centuries ago to children across the water: —

"A tinker, a tailor,
A soldier or sailor,
A rich man, a poor man,
A priest or a parson,
A ploughman or a thief."

The virgin soil being thus artfully prepared to receive superstition, the boy or girl goes forth among playmates similarly equipped, with them to practice various forms of conjuration in their innocent sports, without in the least knowing what they are doing. Here are a few of them: —

Making a cross upon the ground before your opponent, at the same time muttering "criss-cross," when playing at marbles, to make him miss his shot, as I have often seen done in my schoolboy days. This is merely a relic of that superstition attached to making the sign of the cross, as a charm against the power of evil spirits.

The innocent sounding words "criss-cross" we believe originally to have been Christ's Cross.

Children of both sexes count apple seeds by means of the pretty jingling rhymes, so like to the German flower oracle, often employed by children of a larger growth. It has been set to music.

"One I love,
Two I love,
Three I love, I say,
Four I love with all my heart,
Five I cast away;
Six he loves,
Seven she loves,
Eight both love;
Nine he comes,
Ten he tarries,
Eleven he courts,
Twelve he marries."

Holding the pretty field buttercup under another's chin, in order to see if he or she loves butter, is a good form of divination. So is the practice of blowing off the fluffy dandelion top, after the flower has gone to seed, to determine

the hour, as that flower always opens at about five in the morning, and shuts at about eight in the evening, thus making it stand in the room of a clock for shepherds. This plant has also been called the rustic oracle. To find the time of day, as many puffs as it takes to blow away the downy seed balls gives the answer. The same method of divination is employed by children to find out if their mothers want them; or to waft a message to some loved one; or to know if such or such a person is thinking of them; and whether he or she lives north, east, south, or west.

To the same general purport is the invocation:

"Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day."

We understand that the equally familiar form, —

"Snail, snail, put out your horn,"

is repeated in China as well as in this country, though sometimes altered to

"Snail, snail, come out of your hole,
Or else I'll beat you black as a coal."

One equally familiar form of childish invocation appears in the pretty little lady-bird rhyme, so often repeated by the young : —

"Lady-bird, lady-bird,
Fly away home,
Your house is on fire,
Your children will burn."

A favorite way, with boys, of choosing sides for a game of ball is by measuring the stick. To do this, the leader of one side first heaves the stick in the air, skilfully catching it, as it falls, at a point as near a hand's-breadth to the end as possible, as his opponent must then measure the stick with him, alternately hand-over-hand, from the point where it is caught. The one securing enough of the last of the stick for a hold, has the first choice. This is determination by lot.

Still another form of invocation, formerly much used to clinch a bargain between boys, when "swapping" jack-knives or marbles, runs to this effect : —

"Chip, chop, chay,
Give a thing, give a thing,
Never take it back again."

The process of counting a person out in the familiar phrase as being "it," is fairly traced back to the ancient custom of designating a criminal from among his fellows by lot. The form that we know the best in New England, a sort of barbaric doggerel, according to Mr. Burton, is still current in Cornwall, England, and goes in this wise: —

"Ena, mena, bora, mi:
Kisca, lara, mova, di:
Eggs, butter, cheese, bread,
Stick, stock, stone dead."

The resemblance between the foregoing, and what is current among playfellows on this side of the water easily suggests that the boys of the "good Old Colony times," so often referred to with a sigh of regret, brought their games and pastimes along with them. As now remembered, the doggerel charm runs as follows: —

"Eny, meny, mony might,
Huska, lina, bony tight,
Huldy, guldy, boo!"

In getting ready for a game of "tag," "I spy," or "hide and seek," the one to whom this last magic word falls becomes the victim or is said to be "it." So in like manner the rhymed formula, following, is employed in counting a child "out": —

"One-ery, two-ery, ickery Ann,
Fillicy, fallicy, Nicholas, John,
Queever, quaver, English knaver,
Stinckelum, stanckelum, Jericho, buck."

A more simple counting-out rhyme is this:

"One, two, three,
Out goes he (or she)."

"Tit, tat, toe," is still another form, repeated with variations according to locality.

These few examples may serve to show that what the performers themselves regard only as a simple expedient in the arranging of their games, if they ever give the matter a thought, is really a survival of the belief in the efficacy of certain magical words, turned into rhyme, to propitiate success. If this idea

had not been instilled into our children by long custom and habit, it is not believed that they would continue to repeat such unmeaning drivel. Yet, as childish as it may seem, it advances us one step in solving the intricate problem in hand; for here, too, "the child is father to the man."

III

WEATHER LORE

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair." — *Shakespeare.*

THERE is a certain class of so-called signs, that from long use have become so embedded in the every-day life of the people as to pass current with some as mere whimsical fancies, with others as possessing a real significance. At any rate, they crop out everywhere in the course of common conversation. Most of them have been handed down from former generations, while not a few exhale the strong aroma of the native soil itself.

Of this class of familiar signs or omens, affecting only the smaller and more casual happenings one may encounter from day to

day, or from hour to hour, those only will be noticed which seem based on actual superstition. Many current weather proverbs accord so exactly with the observations of science as to exclude them from any such classification. They are simply the homely records of a simple folk, drawn from long experience of nature in all her moods. As even the prophecies of the Weather Bureau itself often fail of fulfilment, it is not to be wondered at if weather proverbs sometimes prove no better guide, especially when we consider that "all signs fail in a dry time."

The following are a few examples selected from among some hundreds: —

When a cat races playfully about the house, it is a sign that the wind will rise.

It is a sign of rain if the cat washes her head behind her ears; of bad weather when Puss sits with her tail to the fire.

Spiders crawling on the wall denote rain.

If a dog is seen eating green grass it is a sign of coming wet weather.

Hang up a snake skin for rain.

If the grass should be thickly dotted in the morning with cobwebs of the ground spider, glistening with dew, expect rain. Some say it portends the exact opposite. This puts us in mind of Cato's quaint saying that "two auguries cannot confront each other without laughing."

If the kettle should boil dry, it is a sure sign of rain. Very earnestly said a certain respectable, middle-aged housewife to me: "Why, sir, sometimes you put twice as much water in the kettle without its boiling away."

If the cattle go under trees when the weather looks threatening, there will be a shower. If they continue feeding, it will probably be a steady downpour.

A threatened storm will not begin, or the wind go down, until the turning of the tide to flood. Not only the people living along shore, but all sailors believe this.

Closely related to the above is the belief that a sick person will not die until ebb tide.

When that goes out, the life goes with it. I have often heard this said in some seaports in Maine.

These popular notions, concerning the influence of the tides, be it said, have come down to us from a remote antiquity. The Pythagorean philosopher, indeed, stoutly affirmed that the ebbing and flowing of the sea was nothing less than the respiration of the world itself, which was supposed to be a living monster, alternately drawing in water, instead of air, and heaving it out again.

Again, an old salt, who had perhaps heard of Galileo's theory, once tried to illustrate to me the movement of the tides by comparing it to that of a man turning over in bed, and dragging the bedclothes with him, his notion being that as the world turned round, the waters of the ocean were acted upon in a like manner.

To resume the catalogue: —

A bee was never caught in the rain — that is, if the bee scents rain, it keeps near the

hive. If, on the contrary, it flies far, the day will be fair. The ancients believed this industrious little creature possessed of almost human intelligence.

When the squirrels lay in a greater store of nuts than usual, expect a cold winter.

If the November goose-bone be thick, so will the winter weather be unusually severe. This prediction appears as regularly as the return of the seasons.

Many meteors falling presage much snow.

"If it rains before seven,
It will clear before eleven."

"You can tell before two.
What it's going to do."

There will be as many snow-storms in a winter as there are days remaining in the month after the first fall of snow.

Children are told, of the falling snow, that the old woman, up in the sky, is shaking her feather-bed.

High tides on the coast of Maine are considered a sign of rain.

When the muskrat builds his nest higher than usual, it is a sign of a wet spring, as this means high water in the ponds and streams.

"A winter fog
Will kill a dog,"

which is as much as to say that a thaw, with its usual accompaniments of fog and rain, is invariably productive of much sickness.

Winter thunder is to old folks death, and to young folks plunder.

"Sound, travelling far and wide,
A stormy day will betide."

Do business with men when the wind is northwest — that signifies that a clear sky and bracing air are most conducive to alertness and energy; yet Hamlet says: "I am but mad north-northwest; when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw."

That was certainly a pretty conceit, no matter if it has been lost sight of, that the sun always dances upon Easter morning.

One of the oldest of weather rhymes runs in this wise: —

"Evening gray and morning red,
Brings down rain on the traveller's head;
Evening red and morning gray,
Sends the traveller on his way."

Science having finally accepted what vulgar philosophy so long maintained, namely that the moon exerts an undoubted influence upon the tides of the sea, all the various popular beliefs concerning her influence upon the weather that have been wafted to us over, we know not how many centuries, find ready credence. If the mysterious luminary could perform one miracle, why not others? Thus reasoned the ignorant multitude.

The popular fallacy that the moon is made of "greene cheese," as sung by Heywood, and repeated by that mad wag Butler, in "Hudibras," may be considered obsolete, we suppose, but in our youth we have often heard this said, and, it is to be feared, half believed it.

Cutting the hair on the waxing of the moon, under the delusion that it will then grow better, is another such.

As preposterous as it may seem, our worthy ancestors, or some of them at least, firmly believed that the Man in the Moon was veritable flesh and blood.

In "Curious Myths," Mr. Baring-Gould refers the genesis of this belief to the Book of Numbers.[1]

An old Scotch rhyme runs thus: —

"A Saturday's change and a Sunday's prime,
Was nivver gude mune in nae man's time."

If the horns of the new moon are but slightly tipped downward, moderate rains may be looked for; if much tipped, expect a downpour. On the other hand, if the horns are evenly balanced, it is a sure sign of dry weather. Some one says in "Adam Bede," "There's no likelihood of a drop now an' the moon lies like a boat there." The popular notion throughout New England is that when the new moon is turned downward, it cannot hold water. Hence the familiar sayings of a wet or a dry moon.

[1] Chap. 15, 32 v.

If the Stormy Petrel (Mother Cary's Chicken) is seen following in the wake of a ship at sea, all sailors know that a storm is brewing, and that it is time to make all snug on board. As touching this superstition, I find the following entry in the Rev. Richard Mather's *Journal*: "This day, and two days before, we saw following ye ship a little bird, like a swallow, called a Petterill, which they say doth follow ships against foule weather."

Therefore, in honest Jack's eyes, to shoot one of these little wanderers of the deep, not only would invite calamity, but would instantly bring down a storm of indignation on the offender's head. And why, indeed, should this state of mind in poor Jack be wondered at, when he hears so much about kraaken, mermaids, sea-serpents, and the like chimera, and when those who walk the quarter-deck readily lend themselves to the fostering of his delusions?

A mare's tail in the morning is another sure presage of foul weather. This consists

in a long, low-hanging streak of murky vapor, stretching across a wide space in the heavens, and looking for all the world like the trailing smoke of some ocean steamer, as is sometimes seen long before the steamer heaves in sight. The mare's tail is really the black signal of the advancing storm, drawn with a smutty hand across the fair face of the heavens. Hence the legend, —

"Mackerel sky and mare's tails
Make lofty ships carry low sails."

If the hedgehog comes out of his hole on Candlemas Day,[1] and sees his shadow, he goes back to sleep again, knowing that the winter is only half over. Hence the familiar prediction : —

[1] Candlemas Day (2 February) is observed as a festival day by the Roman Catholics, and still holds a place in the calendar of the Episcopal Church. It is kept in memory of the purification of the Virgin, who presented the infant Jesus in the Temple. A number of candles were lighted, it is said in memory of Simeon's song (Luke ii, 32), "A light to lighten the Gentiles." Hence the name of Candlemas. Edward VI. forbade the practice of lighting the churches in 1548.

"If Candlemas day is fair and clear,
There'll be two winters in the year."

The same thing is said of the bear, in Germany, as of the hedgehog or woodchuck.

The Germans say that the badger peeps out of his hole on Candlemas Day, and if he finds snow on the ground, he walks abroad; but if the sun is shining, he draws back into his hole again. At any rate, the habits of this predatory little beast are considered next to infallible by most country-folk in New England.

A similar prediction carries this form: On Candlemas Day just so far as the sun shines in, just so far will the snow blow in.

"As far as the sun shines in on Candlemas Day
So far will the snow blow in before May:
As far as the snow blows in on Candlemas Day
So far will the sun shine in before May."

From these time-honored prophecies is deduced the familiar warning: —

"Just half your wood and half your hay
Should be remaining on Candlemas Day."

An old Californian predicted a dry season for the year 1899, because he had noticed that the rattlesnakes would not bite of late, a never failing sign of drought which few, we fancy, would feel inclined to put to the test.

An unusually cold winter is indicated by the greater thickness of apple skins, corn husks, and the like.

The direction from which the wind is blowing usually indicates what the weather will be for the day, — wet or dry, hot or cold, — but here is a rhymed prediction which puts all such prophecies to shame: —

"The West wind always brings wet weather
The East wind wet and cold together,
The South wind surely brings us rain,
The North wind blows it back again.
If the sun in red should set,
The next day surely will be wet;
If the sun should set in gray,
The next will be a rainy day."

This falls more strictly in line with many of the so-called signs which, like the old

woman's indigo, if good would either sink or swim, she really didn't know which; or like the predictions of the old almanac makers, who so shrewdly foretold rain in April, and snow in December.

IV

SIGNS OF ALL SORTS

"Authorized by her grandam." — *Macbeth.*

IF you sneeze before breakfast, you will have company before dinner.

If you pick the common red field lily, it will make you freckled.

A spark in the candle denotes a letter in the post office for you.

To hand a cup with two spoons in it to any one, is a sign of a coming wedding in the family.

If a cat is allowed to get into bed with an infant, the child will be strangled by the animal sucking its breath, or by lying across its chest.

If my right ear burns, some one is talking about me, hence the familiar saying, "I'll make

his ears tingle for him." Pliny records this omen. Also in "Much Ado About Nothing," Beatrice exclaims, "What fire is in mine ears!"

When the right ear itches or burns, the person so affected will shortly cry; when it is the left, he will laugh. One version runs in this wise: —

"Left or right
Good at night."

Late blossoming of vines or fruit trees will be followed by much sickness. This probably rests upon the theory that a mild autumn will be a sickly autumn, which is the same thing as saying that unseasonable weather is pretty sure to be unwholesome weather. The same prediction is expressed by the old saying that "A green Christmas makes a fat church-yard." Both predictions agree with the observations of medical science.

A spoon in the saucer and another in the cup denote that the person using them will be a spendthrift, and probably come to want; but two

spoons to one dish of ice-cream denote foresight and true thrift.

"Sing before you eat,
Cry before you sleep."

Or, if you sing before breakfast, you will cry before supper.

Pull out one gray hair, and ten will grow in its place.

Should you happen to let drop your scissors, or other sharp instrument, and they should stick upright in the floor, it is a sign that you will soon see a stranger.[1]

Dropping the dishcloth has the same significance.

Two cowlicks, growing on the same person's head, denote that he will eat his bread in two kingdoms — that is, be a traveller in foreign parts.

Should a cow swallow her cud, the animal will die, unless another cud be immediately given her.

Hard-hack[2] was thus named by the early col-

[1] See the ominous import of this farther on.

[2] The white and purple spiræa.

onists, who declared that the tough stalk turned the edge of the mower's scythe.

If you see a white horse, you will immediately after see a red-haired woman.

Bubbles gathering on top of a cup of coffee or chocolate indicate, if they cluster at the middle, or "form an island" in prophetic parlance, money coming to you. If, however, the bubbles gather at the sides of the cup, you will not get the money.

Two chairs, placed by accident back to back, are a sign of a stranger.

Coming in at one door, and immediately going out at another, has the same meaning.

A tea-stem floating in the tea-cup — a common thing before the day of tea-strainers — also foreshadows the coming of a stranger. Old people say "you must butter his head and throw him under the table, if the charm is to work." A tea-leaf means the same thing, its length denoting whether the stranger will be short or tall.

To let fall your fork is a sure sign that you are going to have a caller on that very evening.

or, as the girls declare, have "a beau." A very estimable lady said when telling me this, that when she was a young girl she never had that accident happen to her that she did not immediately get ready for a caller; and she added that seldom, or never, was this sign known to fail.

If a young girl has the nosebleed, it is a sign that she is in love.[1]

If your nose itches you will either

> "See a stranger,
> Kiss a fool,
> Or be in danger."

If your left hand itches, you will shortly receive money; if it is the right hand, get ready to shake hands with a stranger.

A ringing or "dumb-bell" in the ear denotes that you may expect startling news of some sort.

A swarm of bees in June is worth a silver spoon.

Four persons meeting in a crowded place and shaking hands cross-wise, is a sign that

[1] For the ill omens of nosebleed, see Chapter ix.

one of the party will be married within the year.

Should you meet a person on the stairs, one or the other must go back, or some misfortune will happen to both.

If you should fail to fold up your napkin after a meal at which you are a guest, you will not again be invited to that table.

Think of the devil and he is at your elbow. The point of this robust saying is now much softened into "think of some one and he is at your elbow"; but it seems at first to have had reference to an enemy or to one you would rather avoid. The saying is quite common to-day.

A very old rhyme about the way in which one wears out a shoe, runs in this way:—

"Tip at the toe, live to see woe,
Wear at the side, live to be a bride,
Wear at the ball, live to spend all,
Wear at the heel, live to save a deal."

Even the days of the week possess peculiar significance to the future welfare of the new-born infant:—

"Sunday's child is full of grace,
Monday's child is fair of face,
Tuesday's child is solemn and sad,
Wednesday's child is merry and glad;
Thursday's child is inclined to thieving,
Friday's child is free in giving:
Saturday's child works hard for his living."

This saying is familiar to every one:—

"Whistling girls and crowing hens
Always come to no good ends."

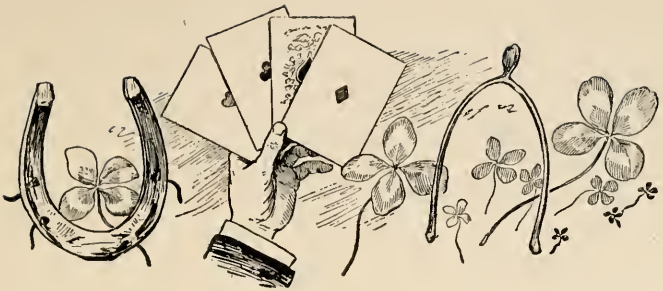
Or, as they say it in the Old Country:—

"A whistling woman and crowing hen,
Are neither fit for God nor men."

An old woman, skilled in such matters, declares that when vagrant cats begin to collect around the back-yards, "it's a sure sign the winter's broken."

Whistling to keep one's courage up, or for a wind, are rather in the nature of an invocation to some occult power than a sign. Sailors, it is well known, have a superstitious fear of whistling at sea, believing it will bring on a storm.

Yawning is said to be catching. Well, if it is not catching, it comes so near to being so, that most persons accept it as a fact; and laugh as we may, daily experience goes to confirm it as such, and must continue to do so until some more satisfactory explanation is found than we yet know of.



V

CHARMS TO GOOD LUCK

"The nights are wholesome ; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm."

OF the things closely associated in the popular mind with good or bad luck, what in short one may or may not do to obtain the favors or turn aside the frowns of fortune, the list is a long one. We say "God bless me!" when we sneeze, as an invocation to good luck. Then, for instance, it is considered lucky to find a cast-off horseshoe, or a four-leaved clover, or to see the new moon over the right shoulder, or to have a black cat in the house, especially one that comes to you of its own accord. Then there also is the

lucky pocket-piece, which the owner will seldom part with, although I once heard a man loudly lamenting that he had "sold his luck" by doing so. There also is the lucky-bone of a haddock,[1] the wishing-bone of a chicken, the lucky base-ball bat, and, what is still more strange, the lucky spider, if one happens to be found on one's clothes, — though this will hardly prevent, we imagine, all womankind from screaming out to the nearest person to come and brush off the hateful little creature. Many will not kill a spider on account of this belief, which is supposed to be derived from the romantic story of King Robert Bruce and the spider.

The familiar saying, "There's luck in odd numbers," lingers in song and story. Does not Rory O'More say so? Odd numbers or combinations of odd numbers are almost invariably chosen in buying lottery tickets. More-

[1] It was commonly believed that the haddock bore the mark of St. Peter's thumb, ever since that saint took the tribute penny out of a fish of that species.

over, they have received the highest official sanction for a very long time. In the "Art of Navigation," printed in the year 1705, the following rule is laid down for firing salutes by ships of the royal navy: "to salute with an odd number of guns, the which are to be answered with fit correspondency. And the number of odd guns is so punctually observed, that whenever they are given *even* 'tis received for an infallible sign that either the captain or some noted officer is dead in the voyage."

The above rule or custom has held good to this day. In the United States the prescribed salute to the President is twenty-one guns; seventeen to the Vice-President, and so on in descending scale, according to rank, in the several branches of the civil, military, and naval service. Medicines are often taken an odd number of times, though not invariably, as they once were. A hen is always set on an odd number of eggs, although I could never find any one who could give any other

reason than custom for it. What Biddy does when she "steals her own nest" is not ascertained.

It appears from such data as we have been able to gather that the number Three and its multiple Nine were formerly held to be indispensable to the successful working of the magician's arts. In "Macbeth," the weird sisters mutter the dark incantation: —

> "Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
> And thrice again to make up nine! —
> Peace! — the charm's wound up."

And yet again, when concocting their charmed hell-broth, while awaiting the coming of the ambitious thane to learn his fate of them, the mystic rite begins by declaring the omens propitious: —

> "1 *Witch.* Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed.
> 2 *Witch.* Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined."

With the Romans, three handfuls of salt cast over a dead body had all the virtues of a funeral. Pirates were formerly hung at low-water

mark and left hanging there until three tides had overflowed them. Shakespeare makes Falstaff say: "This is the third time; I hope good luck lies in odd numbers." Even now, the cabalistic phrase "third time never fails," prompts the twice unsuccessful candidate for fortune's favors to renewed and more vigorous effort. In short, there seems to be no end to the virtues inherent in odd numbers.

But as all rules have their exceptions, so with this prophetic rule of three, the fates would seem to have ordained that it might be made to work both ways. Simply by keeping one's eyes and ears open one sees and hears many things. An enterprising news-gatherer jots down a bit of superstition touching the fateful side of the rule in question that came to him in this easy sort of way: "I heard," he says, "a most sensible person, the other day, exclaim because Queen Victoria had been obliged twice to postpone her trip to the south of France, once on account of the unsettled state of affairs over there, and again because of the unsettled state

of the weather. 'The third time will be fatal to her,' added this cheerful individual; 'you just mark my words.'"

It is nevertheless true, however, that the cabalistic number Thirteen stands quite alone, so far as we are informed, as the sombre herald of misfortune. But here, as elsewhere, the exception only goes to prove the rule.

A gentleman holding a lucrative office under the government once told me that two of his clerks wore iron finger rings, because they were supposed to be lucky. It is a matter of general knowledge that certain gems or precious stones are worn on scarf-pins, watch-chains, finger rings, or other articles of personal adornment solely on account of the prevailing belief in their efficacy to ward off sickness or disease, prevent accidents, keep one's friends, — in short, to bring the wearer good luck. This branch of the subject will be more fully treated of presently.

More unaccountable still is the practice of wearing or carrying about on one's person a rabbit's foot as a talisman, that timid little

animal always having been intimately associated with the arts of the magician and sorcerer. But it must always be bunny's hind foot. The insatiate passion for novelty, we understand, has now installed a turkey's claw in the room of the rabbit's foot, to some extent, showing that even credulity itself is the obedient slave of fashion. Of course neither the rabbit's foot nor turkey's claw is worn in its natural rough state, but under the jeweller's skilful hands, tipped with gold or silver and set with the wearer's favorite gem (topaz, amethyst, or whatever it may be), the charm, or mascot, becomes an ornament to be worn, either suspended from the neck, the wrist, or belt, or as a clasp for the cape. The practice of wearing a caul,[1] or an amulet blessed by the priest,

[1] It is deemed lucky to be born with a caul or membrane over the face. In France *être né coiffée* signifies that a person is extremely fortunate. It is believed to be an infallible protection against drowning, and under that idea is frequently advertised for sale in the newspapers and purchased by seamen. If bought by lawyers they become as eloquent as Demosthenes or Cicero, and thereby get a great deal of practice.— FIELDING.

clearly denotes that here rich and poor meet on common ground. It is not proposed, however, to treat of those beliefs which may be directly traced to the teachings of a particular church, or that have become so embedded in the faith it inculcates as to be an inseparable part of it. The Protestant world, or that part of it we live in, is intrenched in no such stronghold.

To continue the catalogue: —

A black cat, without a single white hair, is a witch of the sort that brings luck to the house. Keeping one also insures to unmarried females of the family plenty of sweethearts.

A branch of the mountain ash kept in the house, or hung out over the door, will keep the witches out.

Good luck is frequently crystallized in certain uncouth but expressive sayings, such, for example, as "nigger luck," "lucky strike," or "Cunard luck," referring to the remarkable exemption of a certain transatlantic steamship company from loss of life by disasters to its ships. This particular saying has been quite

frequently heard of late in consequence of the really providential escape of the steamship *Pavonia*, of that line, from shipwreck, while on her voyage from Liverpool to Boston. What was uppermost in the minds of some of the passengers and crew may easily be inferred from the following extract, with which a relation of the good ship's fortunate escape from foundering concludes: —

"The change of the moon passed at 9.30 A.M., and the light breeze changed at almost the same moment. The gulls were sitting on the water, which was a sign of luck, according to the sailors. Then we discovered a lot of 'Mother Carey's chickens' near the ship, which was also a lucky omen, so we felt that Friday was to be our lucky day."

Unquestionably, the horseshoe is the favorite symbol of good luck the world over. You will seldom see a man so much in a hurry that he will not stop to pick one up. Although the iron of which the shoe is fashioned is no longer endowed with magic power, as it once was, no

sooner has it been beaten by the smith into the form of a shoe than, *presto*, it becomes a power to conjure with. Popular *dictum* even prescribes that the shoe must be placed with the prongs upward or its virtue will be lost. It must, moreover, be a cast-off shoe or the charm will not work.

The luck of the horseshoe has become proverbial. We are now dealing with facts of common knowledge. Indeed, we do not see how any form of superstition could be more fully or more freely recognized in the everyday affairs of life. Even those who scout the superstition itself, as a thing unworthy of serious attention, do not hesitate to avail themselves of its popularity for their own ends, thus giving it a still wider currency. In short, this hoary superstition is thriftily turned to account by every imaginable device to tickle the fancy or to turn a penny, although in being thus employed it has quite cut loose from its ancient traditions.

Thus it is that we now see the horseshoe stamped on monograms, on Christmas-cards, on

book covers, or even used in the title of a book, most effectively, as in the case of "Horseshoe Robinson." It also is seen worked into floral designs to be hung above the bride's head, at a wedding, or reverently laid upon the last resting-place of the dead. Surely superstition could go no farther.

The horseshoe has also come to be a favorite trade-mark with manufacturers and dealers in all sorts of wares. It is elaborately worked up in gold and silver charms for those who would rather be lucky than not, regardless of the original *dictum* that, to be serviceable, the shoe must be made of iron and nothing else. There lies before me, as I write this, the advertisement of a certain farrier, who rests his plea for custom upon the fact that as horseshoes bring luck to the purchaser, therefore every horse should be shod with his shoes. A certain horseshoers' union attributes its victory over the employers, in the matter of shorter hours, to the efficacy of its trade symbol. And not long ago the fortunate escape of Boston from a disastrous conflagration

was heralded in a daily paper with a cut of a horseshoe prefixed to the account.

Of late years, too, the horseshoe has grown to be a favorite symbol in the house, — a sort of household fetich, as it were, — if not because of any faith in its traditional ability to bring good luck, one is at loss to know why a piece of old iron should be so conspicuously hung up in the houses of rich and poor alike.

The horseshoe was always, also, the favorite emblem of the tavern and inn, in all countries. Such signs as the "Three Horseshoes," once swung in Boston streets. In Samuel Sewall's Diary we find the following entry: "Sanctifie to me ye deth of old Mrs. Glover who kept the 3 horse shoes, and who dyed ye last night." Sewall, who lived in the immediate neighborhood, leaves us in the dark as to whether he mourned most for Mrs. Glover or her exhilarating mixtures.

Returning to its proper place in folk-lore, I myself have seen the horsehoe nailed to

the bowsprit of a vessel, over house and barn doors, and even to bedsteads. In the country, its supposed virtues continue to hold much of their old sway, while among sailors a belief in them has suffered little, if any, loss since the day of Nelson and of the *Victory*. On some very old country house, as old as the witchcraft times, one can still see the shape of a horseshoe wrought in the brick-work of the chimneys, as well as one nailed above the door, thus cleverly closing every avenue against the entrance of witches. But of all the odd caprices connected with the use of the horseshoe, that related of Samuel Dexter, of Boston, must carry off the palm for oddity. He, being dissatisfied with his minister, Dr. Codman, nailed a horseshoe to his pew door, and then nailed up the pew itself.

The origin of this remarkable superstition is involved in the obscurity of past ages. It is usually attributed to the virtue of cold iron to keep witches out, through their inability to

step over it, and is probably allied to that other superstition about the driving of iron nails into the walls of Roman houses, with a like object. Beyond that point its meaning grows more and more obscure. The conjunction, so essential to perfect the charm, between iron in any form and the horse, is said to have come from the magical properties attributed to the animal by the ancients, in whose mythology the horse always plays an important part. King Richard, on Bosworth field, offers his kingdom for a horse, and Poor Richard, in his Almanac, tells us how a man lost his life for want of a nail in his horse's shoe. Butler, from whose pen figures of speech gush forth like water from a never-failing spring, declares that evil spirits are chased away by dint

"of sickle, horseshoe, hollow flint."

In Gay's fable of "The Old Woman and her Cats," the alleged witch laments that

"Straws laid across my path retard;
The horseshoes nail'd each threshold's guard."

Turning now from the merely passive to the active agency on the part of the seeker after fortune's favors, we enter upon a no less marvellous, but vastly more attractive, field. Here is something that is tried every day: —

Of two persons breaking apart the wishing-bone of a chicken before forming a wish, the one getting the longer piece is assured of the fulfilment of his or her wish; the shorter piece bodes disappointment.

Another way to test fickle fortune is to form a wish while a meteor is falling; if one can do so the desire will be gratified. This saying would be no bad symbol of the importance of seizing a golden opportunity ere it has escaped us. As the immortal Shakespeare says: —

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men
> Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

If a load of hay goes by, make a wish on it and your wish will be gratified, provided you instantly look another way. But the charm will surely be broken if, like Lot's wife, you should look back.

To see the new moon with the old in her arms, a much more common thing by the way in this country than in England, is considered lucky; as runs an old couplet: —

> "Late, late yestreen, I saw the new moone
> Wi' the auld moone in hir armes."

Here is another instance wherein the auguries differ. An old sea-rhyme founded on the same thing adds this prediction: —

> "And if we gang to sea, master,
> I fear we'll come to harm."

It is also accounted good luck to see the new moon over the right shoulder, especially if you instantly feel in your pocket and find money there, as your luck thereby will be prodigiously increased, but you must take care instantly to turn the money over in your pocket.

Burglars are said to carry a piece of coal, or some other object, about with them for luck.

Upon getting out of bed in the morning, always put the right foot foremost. Slightly altered, this injunction has been turned into the familiar saying: "Put your best foot fore-

most." Dr. Johnson was so particular about this rule, that if he happened to plant his left foot on the threshold of a house, he would turn back, and reënter right foot foremost. Similarly, one must always begin dressing the right foot first. An exception occurs to us: in military tactics it is always the left foot that goes foremost.

Professional gamblers are firm believers in the element of luck, the world over. According to their *dictum*, a youth who has never gambled before, is sure to be lucky at his first essay at play. Finding a piece of money or carrying a dice in the pocket also insures good fortune, they say.

To secure luck at cards or to change your luck, when it is going against you, you must walk three times around your chair or else blow upon the cards with your breath. Beyond reasonable doubt you will be a winner. Not so very long ago, it was the custom for women to offer to sit cross-legged in order to procure luck at cards for their friends. I have seen players

spit on their hands for the same purpose. Sitting cross-legged, with the fingers interlaced, was formerly considered the correct magical posture.

The hair will grow better if cut on the waxing of the moon. This notion is probably based on the symbolism of the moon's waxing and waning, as associated with growing and declining nature.

A Newfoundland fisherman to-day spits on the first piece of silver given him for luck. In the Old Country this was also a common practice among the lower class of hucksters, upon receiving the price of the first goods sold on that day, which they call "hansell."[1] Boxers often spit into their hands before engaging in a set-to, as also did the schoolboys of my own age, who thought it a charm to prevent the

[1] Edward Winslow makes use of this word in speaking of an Indian who had been taken prisoner at Plymouth, and confined in the fort newly built there. "So he was locked in a chain to a staple in the court of guard and there kept. Thus was our fort handselled, this being the first day, as I take it, that ever any watch was there kept." — Winslow's "Relation."

master's ferule from hurting them as much as it otherwise would, but later found out their mistake.

In some country districts the belief still holds that if a live frog can be passed through a sick cow the animal will get well, but the frog must be alive and kicking, or the charm will not work.

Salt was formerly the first thing taken into a new house, in the belief that the occupants would never want for bread in that house.

"Happy is the corpse that the rain rains on." This is a sort of corollary to the belief, that it is a fortunate sign if the sun shines on a newly wedded couple.

The long established custom of laying the head of the dead to the east is probably a survival of the ancient sun-worship. It is traced back to the Phœnicians. In Shakespeare's "Cymbeline" we find this reference to it: —

> "We must lay his head to the east:
> My father hath reason for't."

We are reminded that ropes are coiled,

cranks turned, and eggs beaten with the sun. One writer upon Folk-lore [1] remarks that passing the bottle at table from right to left, instead of being merely proper form, really comes from this ancient superstition.

Telling the bees of a death in the family was formerly a quite general practice, if indeed it has entirely died out. I know that it has been practised in New England within my own recollection. It was the belief that a failure to so inform the bees would lead to their dwindling away and dying, according to some interpreters, or to their flying away, according to others. The manner of proceeding was to knock with the house-key three times against the hives, at the same time telling the noisy inmates that their master or mistress, as the case might be, was dead. One case is reported where an old man actually sung a psalm in front of some hives. In New England the hives were sometimes draped in black. The semi-sacred character with which antiquity

[1] Mr. Coxe.

invested this wonderful little insect sufficiently accounts for the practice. Mr. Whittier has some verses about it in "Home Ballads." Beating upon a pot or kettle when bees are swarming comes from Virgil's injunction, in the like case, to raise tinkling sounds.

Laying a plate for a dead person was in pursuance of the belief that, if it were omitted, one death in the family would speedily be followed by another.

The Passing Bell was originally instituted to drive away evil spirits, as well as to bespeak the prayers of all good Christians for a soul just leaving the body. Sitting up with a dead body originated in a like purpose. The former custom is dimly reflected in the tolling of the bell, the number of strokes indicating the age of the deceased.

It is considered lucky to put on a garment wrong side out. I knew of a sea-captain who, on rising late in the morning of the day he was to sail, in his hurry, put on his drawers wrong side out. He said to his wife, with a laugh,

that he would wear them so for luck. The ship in which he sailed was lost, with all on board, on the very same night; and, as it turned out, the captain's mistake in putting on his clothes proved the means of identifying his mutilated remains when they were found on the beach the next morning.

The trial to discover a witch, made use of by the circle of hysterical young girls in the time of the lamentable witchcraft terror, was to take a sieve and a pair of scissors or shears, stick the points of the shears in the wood of the sieve, and let two of them hold it balanced upright on the tips of their two fingers; then to ask St. Peter and St. Paul if a certain person, naming the one suspected, was a witch. If the right one was hit upon, the sieve would suddenly turn round.

As usual, Butler has something to say of this charm: —

> "Th' oracle of the sieve and shears
> That turns as certain as the spheres."

Another similar charm is that of the Bible

and key. I do not learn of its being practised of late, though it has been put to the trial since I can remember, to discover a thief. It is done in this way. The key is placed upon a certain chapter in the Bible, after which the sacred book is shut and tightly fastened. Both are then hung to a nail. The name of the suspected person is then repeated three times by some one present, while another recites: —

"If it turns to thee, thou art the thief."

Should the key have turned, the guilt is, of course, fixed upon the real criminal.

Perhaps the manner of proceeding in such cases will be made clearer by the following relation of an actual test and its results, which took place in England some thirty years ago, and was given to the world as a curious instance of the degree of superstition then still existing in many parts of Great Britain. The account goes on to say that: "At the Cricklade Petty Sessions, in Wiltshire, a matron named Eliza Glass made a statement which was briefly

as follows: Her father had lost or missed the sum of four pounds sterling, and suspicion, apparently unfounded, fell upon herself and her husband. The theory was formed that she had stolen a key, and thus her husband had obtained access to the money. It was determined to test the matter by the 'Bible and key.' The key was placed in the Bible on a particular place in Solomon's Song, the book closed and tied, and suspended by a string passed through the handle of the key, which protruded. One of the persons then thought of the suspected individual, the edge of the book turned toward the tester, and Mrs. Glass was adjudged guilty, or as she expressed it, 'upset.' All this was in her absence. But she knew that she was innocent, and when informed of her condemnation adopted tactics which others, more astute than she, had used before her; she determined to impeach the credibility of the witness. Taking a New Testament she put the key on the words 'Blessed are the pure in heart,' and sus-

pending the book as before, she was acquitted. Troubled by the apparent inconsistency of the Old and the New Testaments, she inquired of the magistrates what was to be done. They dismissed her with the remark that the bench could not interfere, and that, if innocent, she ought to be satisfied with the approval of a good conscience."

Thrusting a knife between the leaves of a Bible to obtain a name for a child has not gone out of use even yet.

The Wassail, or Loving Cup, is nothing but a relic of superstition, like drinking of healths, which custom, though no longer an indispensable ceremonial on state occasions, as it has been within the century, lives yet in the spirit whenever two friends happen to pledge each other in a social glass, silently or otherwise. The familiar "Here's to you!" is neither more nor less than an invocation to good luck.

Throwing an old shoe is perhaps most intimately associated, in the popular mind, with marriage ceremonies; but it is also found doing

duty in other matters concerning personal advantage or welfare, — as when, for instance, a person was going out to transact business, it was considered lucky to throw an old shoe after him. The same thing was done when servants were seeking or entering upon situations. So far, the meaning of the act is simple enough, the controlling idea being to propitiate success.

But if we should divest an old shoe of its assumed mystical property, in the name of that superior wisdom which our cultured class is supposed to possess, why would it not be as well, or even better, to throw a new pair after the candidate for good fortune? But no, it must be an *old* shoe. And therein lies the whole philosophy of the matter. Unless we shall conform to the strict letter of this antiquated custom, there will be no luck about the house.[1]

In Ben Jonson's "Masque of Gypsies," we find this joyous couplet: —

[1] More concerning throwing the shoe will be found under "Marriage."

"Hurle after an old shoe,
I'll be merry whate'er I do."

Much to the same purport is Tennyson's: —

"And wheresoe'er thou move, good luck
Shall throw her old shoe after."

Apropos of beliefs affecting tradespeople of to-day, a newspaper clipping notes the following curious custom prevailing among the street pedlers and small storekeepers of New York, that has its origin with the Russian Jews. In Baxter Street the clothing men and in Division Street the milliners insist that a sale must be made before nine o'clock on Monday morning. No matter what the price and regardless of profit or loss, some piece of goods must be turned into coin by that hour; otherwise the week will prove an unlucky one.

On the other hand, there is a firm belief in some parts of New England that if you pay a bill on Monday, you will pay out money all the rest of the week. Hence, a very natural prejudice has arisen against paying a bill on that day.

Shipmasters are admittedly very superstitious folk. I once knew of a ship being named for a certain well-known cotton mill, because the said mill had always proved a lucky investment to its owners. Another instance came to my knowledge where a master, himself part owner, consulted a clairvoyant about naming his new ship. When the applicant timidly suggested the name of *Pocahontas*, it was promptly rejected with the remark: "She was nothing but an old Indian woman. What do you want to name your vessel after her for? Call her the *Eagle Wing*." And *Eagle Wing* it was.

By way of reënforcing beliefs of this particular kind, we find a newspaper writer saying, it is supposed in all sincerity, as otherwise his offence would be unpardonable: "Don't let us call any of the new ships for Uncle Sam's navy after the state of Maine. For my part, nothing would induce me to go aboard a new *Maine* or a new *Portland*. Like that watch of Captain Sigsbee, which has gone down into the ocean three times, the last plunge being

caused by the explosion of the *Maine*, a superstitious person would prefer to be left at home." Whether or not the navy bureau shall listen to this plea, and change the name proposed for one of the new battle-ships, we fear that an ineffaceable stigma will hereafter rest upon these two names in the minds not alone of seafaring folk, but of the whole generation to whom the twin horrors which these names recall are so familiar.

Still speaking of ships, I suppose few people are aware that until quite recently it was the custom, when a new ship was being built, to put a piece of money, silver or gold, under the heel of each mast. This custom at once recalls that traditional one of putting coins under the corner-stone of a new building; but unlike that, the former act was in full accord with the prevalent notion that it would bring good luck to the vessel.

I find that some people are strongly impressed with the idea that the month or day on which they were born will prove to them a

most critical one throughout their whole lives. Indeed, many strange coincidences of this sort have come to my notice. If a man has happened to have a run of bad luck, he will often tell you that it is because he was born under an unlucky star; if, on the other hand, he has been unusually prosperous, it is commonly said of him that he was born to good luck. So wags the world!

As a fitting pendant to Jernegan's gold-from-sea-water scheme, Mrs. Howe's bank, and Miller's syndicate, all fresh in the memory of everyone, comes the "lucky-box" humbug and its humiliating exposure, as I write. Upon the simple assurance that the possessor of this marvellous box (which could be carried in the pocket) would become instantly lucky, thousands were quickly sold, and the sale of more thousands was only stopped by the prompt intervention of the law!

VI

CHARMS AGAINST DISEASE

"I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do." — *Shakespeare.*

UNDER this heading we shall first call attention to those plants having the alleged power to cure disease or protect from evil influences. But before doing so, we would suggest that the reader turn to his standard or popular dictionary. He will there find the magical word "abracadabra" defined as a charm against fevers.

In former times, the young, unrolled fronds of the male fern were supposed to guard the wearer against the Evil Eye or witchcraft; and were not only worn by the credulous, but also given to the cattle as a charm against being

bewitched.[1] Moonwort fern had the reputation of being able to undo any lock, bolt, or bar, or even to draw nails from the shoe of any horse treading upon it; and mistletoe to be a sure cure for the stone.

The roots and flowers of violets are supposed to moderate anger, and to comfort and strengthen the heart — hence the significant name of heartsease.

St.-John's-wort is still gathered in some parts of the Old Country on the Eve of St. John the Baptist, and hung out over the windows and doors, in accord with the ancient superstition that it would keep out all evil spirits, and shield the inmates from storms and other calamities.

The belief associated with holly, now so generally used for Christmas decoration, comes from Pliny, who writes that "the branches of this tree defend houses from lightning, and men from witchcraft." The common mullein was also held to have potency against hurts inflicted by wild beasts, or any evil coming

[1] Note the poetical reference in another chapter.

near; and, similarly, the mountain ash was considered a protection against the Evil Eye, witches, and warlocks. So, also, a sea-onion was often hung in the doorway, with a like object.

Another charm said to be very efficacious, though the writer has not tried it himself, yet having the sanction of age, is this: "Against a woman's chatter, taste at night, fasting, the root of a radish; on that day the chatter cannot harm thee."

Many of the myths concerning plants still exist in a modified form among us, although it is no doubt true that most people who decorate their houses with evergreens and holly at Christmastide are ignorant of the mysticism they so innocently perpetuate. Yet the Puritan fathers of New England were as utterly opposed to the decorating of houses of worship with "Christmas Greens," as to the observance of the day itself. Could they but revisit the scenes of their earthly labors during that season of unstinted festivity and good cheer, when man's

heart is so warmed through the medium of his stomach, how shocked they would be to see

> "Gilt holly with its thorny pricks,
> And yew and box, with berries small,
> These deck the unused candlesticks,
> And pictures hanging by the wall."

Beyond a doubt, most of the long-standing beliefs, touching the remedies for this or that ailment, belong to a time when the services of a skilled physician or surgeon were not to be had for love or money, or medical aid be instantly summoned to the sick man's bedside by telephone. This was especially true of the sparsely settled parts of the country, where every prudent housewife laid in a stock of roots and herbs against sickness in the family. Some of what nowadays are called "popular remedies," are found in Josselyn's "Rarities." Here are a few of them: —

"The skin of a hawk is good to wear on the stomach for the pain and coldness of it. Lameness (or rheumatic pains) may be cured by lying on a bearskin. Seal oil being cast upon coals

will bring women out of their mother fits." The white cockle-shell was very good to stanch blood. For a rattlesnake bite, "their hearts swallowed fresh, is a good antidote against their Venom, and their liver (the Gall taken out) bruised and applied to their Bitings is a present Remedy—" a clear proof, it seems to us, that the theory of *similia similibus curantur*, did not originate with Dr. Koch, or even with the justly eminent Professor Pasteur.

But even the wonderful advance made by medical science is powerless to eradicate the superstitions concerning disease, which live and thrive in spite of progress, like the noxious weeds that baffle all the farmer's vigilance. Then, there is a considerable constituency who, after making a trial of the regular school of medicine, to no avail, naturally fall back upon the *flotsam* and *jetsam* of bygone times, as a drowning man is said to grasp at a straw. As regards the former statement it may be asserted, as of personal knowledge, that inherited diseases, such as humors, scrofula, fits and the like,

and even birthmarks, in many parts of the country, are still looked upon and talked about, not as a misfortune, but as a visitation upon the family so afflicted. I once heard one of these unfortunates described as "that fitty man."

The advent of Sirius, or the dog-star, was formerly supposed to exert an occult influence upon poor humanity. In that critical season all people were advised to look carefully to their diet, to shun all broiled, salted, and strong meats, and to drink small beer and such other liquors as aids to digestion.

As touching those natural objects having reputed curative properties or virtues, perhaps the common horsechestnut is the most familiar, for the widespread belief in its power to charm away the rheumatism. Several gentlemen of my acquaintance habitually carry this magical nut on their persons, and one was actually found in the pocket of a drowned man while this chapter was being written. Yet I have known those who preferred the potato. A gentleman to whom I happened to mention the subject one

day, to my profound surprise, immediately drew forth a healthy-looking tuber of large size, which he emphatically asserted to be the only thing that had ever relieved a severe attack of rheumatism. I have also known nutmegs to be perforated, and hung round the neck, for a similar purpose.

Wearing eel-skin garters is also more or less practised as a cure for the same complaint.

Putting sulphur in the shoes is also highly commended as a cure for rheumatism. I have known the same thing done as a preventive against an attack of grippe.

Plain or galvanized iron finger rings are also worn for their supposed property to cure the rheumatism.

Another well-to-do business man gravely assured me that a nutmeg, suspended round the neck by a string, was a sure cure for boils "—and no mistake about it—" and strongly urged giving it a trial.

Corns and warts likewise are cured by carrying a horsechestnut on the person. Another

way is to rub the wart with a copper coin, throwing the coin away immediately after. The person picking it up transfers the fungus to himself. Still another way is to first stick a pin in the wart, then to go and stick the same pin into an apple tree, though in England they say it must be an ash. The notion that such things were "catching" seems to have suggested, in a way to be easily understood, the theory of disease transference, to common folk. With this view a puppy is sometimes put into the same bed with a sick child, in the belief that the sickness will pass from the child to the puppy, while both are asleep. A case, in which this remedy was tried, came to my knowledge very recently.

To return to the subject of warts, some countryfolk highly recommend making the sign of the cross against the chimney-back with a piece of chalk, asserting that, as soon as the mark is covered with soot, the warts will go away. Others, equally skilled in this sort of cures, contend that if you steal some beans, and

secretly bury them in the ground the disagreeable excrescences will leave you. Should all else fail you must then sell your warts or corns to somebody. Who'll buy? Who'll buy?

Should you have a decayed tooth extracted, the molar must instantly be thrown into the fire, or you will surely have a cat's tooth come in its place. To dream of losing your teeth is, by many, considered a sure sign of coming trouble. Jet, powdered and mixed with wine, was once thought to be a sure remedy for the toothache.

Wearing a caul is a sure protection against drowning.

One must not kiss a cat; the doing so will expose one to catch some disease.

Hostlers and stable boys believe that it keeps horses healthy to have a goat about the stable.

A gold wedding-ring is believed to be a cure for sties.

Wearing red yarn around the neck is esteemed a prevention against nose-bleeding.

Sticking your jack-knife into the head of the bed will prevent cramps. Another way is to put both your slippers by your bedside, bottoms up, before retiring for the night. Should you neglect this, the cramps will surely return. The gentleman who gave me this receipt, said he got it from his mother. The old way, as laid down in the books, was to lay out your shoes in the form of a cross, before retiring.

In some country districts, a heavy growth of foliage is considered a certain forerunner of coming sickness. The blossoming of trees, in autumn, also forebodes an epidemic of sickness.

It is a matter of common knowledge, that tooth charmers continue to carry on a more or less lucrative trade in the country towns. "What did she do to you?" was asked of a countryman who had just paid a visit to one of these cunning women, at the urgent solicitation of a friend. "Do?" was the bewildered answer, "why, she didn't do nothing at all,

but just said over something to herself, and the pain was all gone in a minute." This person, like a great many others, had a rooted aversion to having a tooth "hauled," as he expressed it, and would have suffered untold tortures from an aching tooth, rather than have gone to a regular practitioner. One woman, in particular, whom I have in mind, enjoys a wide reputation in the neighborhood where she practises her healing art. She simply mutters some incantation, or spell, and *presto!* the most excruciating pain is conjured away; so 'tis said.

There is a very old belief touching the virtue of a halter, that has done service in hanging a criminal, to charm away the head-ache. Probably other powers are attributed to this barbarous instrument of death, for it is said to be a fact, that the negroes of the southern States will pay a great price for a piece of the hangman's noose, to be kept in the house, as a charm.

The madstone is claimed to be a certain

remedy for the bite of rabid dogs, snake bites and the like. The wonderful cures effected by one of these magic stones, owned by a lady living in Mississippi (references being given to quite a number of well-known people, who had either tested the remarkable properties of this particular stone, or who had personal knowledge of the facts), went the rounds of the newspapers some years ago. Upon being applied to the wound or bite, the stone adhered to it until the virus was absorbed. It then fell off, and after being well cleaned, was again applied until it failed to hold. When this took place, the patient was considered out of danger. With this stone it was claimed that the bite of a mad dog could be cured at any time before hydrophobia had set in.

A similar case is reported from Virginia, with details that leave no doubt of the honesty of the principals concerned.

This was the famous Upperville madstone, which has been in the hands of the Fred

family for over one hundred and fifty years. As its name indicates, the peculiar property of this stone is its apparent appetite for the virus to be found in the wound made by the bite of any venomous animal. This is the owner's story:

"The stone was brought to Virginia in 1740 by Joshua Fred, who was a well-to-do farmer in Warwickshire, England, and became an important landowner in Fauquier County. By his wish his descendants had clung to this stone as a priceless heirloom, and I am proud to say that their use of it has always reflected credit upon the good, old-fashioned hospitality and kindliness characteristic of Virginians. It was well known all over the country that anybody might go to the Fred farm with any unfortunate who had been bitten by a dog, and enjoy a certain cure without any cost. For a hundred years none of the Freds would permit any one who was cured in this way by the madstone to pay a farthing, even for board or lodging or horse feed. In later years the vicissitudes of peace and war having somewhat affected the fortunes

of various members of the family, it became the practice to allow visitors who came to use the madstone to pay what they pleased for their entertainment and for the care of their teams. Beyond this, however, no charge whatever was made for scores of most remarkable cures.

"A journal was kept by the various members of the family who had charge of the madstone, in which was entered the name and age of every person on whom it was used, and the character of the wound treated. The entries in this book, made in the quaint handwriting of member after member of the family, the most of whom have long since turned to dust in their graves, are most interesting.

"While the stone was in my possession I had occasion several times to use it upon persons who were brought to me in great agony of mind over wounds they had received from the bite of rabid dogs. The last case occurred just a few days before the sale of the stone. A young boy was brought to my house late at night, who had been bitten on the wrist. The wound

was an ugly one, and the father was in great distress of mind for fear hydrophobia would set in. I placed the stone on the boy's wrist at about ten o'clock and went to bed. The father stayed up and took care of the boy. At two o'clock in the morning, he said, the stone let go. The boy was then sound asleep. The father placed the stone, as I had told him to do, in a glass of milk, on which, when I saw it in the morning, there was a thick green scum. This seemed to be the usual result in all such cases. The stone was never known to let go until it had extracted all the poison, and, on being placed in a glass of warm water or milk, discharged a greenish liquid. The stone itself is perhaps an inch long by three-quarters wide, and is of a velvety, grayish brown color. Years ago it was accidentally broken in two, and the jeweller who placed a gold band around it to hold it together has told me that the inside was a little darker than the outside and was arranged in concentric layers."[1]

[1] *Boston Transcript*, February 13, 1899.

As an antidote against the bite of a dog, you must procure some of the hair of the dog that has bitten you. This has passed into a proverb among habitual topers, with particular reference to taking another "nip."

There is also a more or less current belief, better grounded perhaps than many others of a like nature, that a dog which has bitten a person should not be killed until unmistakable symptoms of rabies have appeared.

Who does not remember the "blue-glass craze" of some fifteen years ago, which spread like wildfire over the land, and as suddenly died out? Whole communities went blue-glass mad. It was enough for some one to have advanced the theory that the cerulean rays were a cure-all, for everybody to accept it with as much confidence as if it had been one of the demonstrated facts of science. Dealers in blue-glass were about the only ones to benefit by the craze which infallibly suggests its own moral, namely, that credulity has not wholly disappeared. Is this doubted when hardly a day

goes by in which some miraculous cure is not heralded abroad by the newspapers? Sometimes it is performed merely by the laying on of hands; and most often without the aid of medicines. Indeed, within a few years, there has sprung up a new school of healing, numbering its tens of thousands proselytes, which not only sets all the best established principles and traditions of the old schools at defiance, but also literally "throws physic to the dogs."

The practice of dipping in the healing waters of the ocean as a cure-all, or preventive of disease for the coming year, formerly prevailed on the Maine coast, particularly at Old Orchard Beach and in the immediate neighborhood, to a very great extent. In its nature and inception the practice certainly more nearly approached the character of those annual pilgrimages made to the famous shrines of the Old World than anything which has come to my notice. Not to mince words, it proceeded from the same superstitious idea, just how originating no one can say. So, every year, on the anniversary of St.

John the Baptist's day, a curious assemblage of country-folk, for miles around, moved by a common impulse, wended their way to the nearest beaches, there to dip in the briny waters, believed to be invested with especial healing powers on this day only, like the bargains advertised to draw custom, and thereby be freed from all the ills which flesh is heir to. On that sacramental day of days, one saw a long string of nondescript wagons, loaded with old and young, moving along the sandy roads leading down from their inland homes to the salt sea. Even the school children thought that they, too, must dip, in imitation of their elders. For some unknown reason, the day, which not only had the sanction of long custom but also is hallowed by such venerated traditions, was given up for the 26th, which is quite like any other day of the year.

As all superstitious folk are generally the last to admit that they are so, so in this instance the followers of this singular custom in general either maintain a discreet silence on the subject,

or refuse to say more than that they go to the beach to bathe, on a fixed day, and at no other time, because other folks do so. The custom undoubtedly arose from a firm belief in the miraculous power of the waters to heal the sick, make the weak strong and the lame to walk — on that day only. That it is a most healthful one few will deny, and as cleanliness is said to be next to godliness, an annual dip at Old Orchard is, at least, one step toward the more spiritual condition.

But it would be a mistake to suppose this singular custom to be an article of religious faith. It simply illustrates the mental and moral stamina of the period in which it flourished. For if founded in faith alone, there is strong probability that it might have survived the ridicule to which it has mostly, if not quite, succumbed.

Whether it be merely a coincidence or not, it is fact that June 26th is also the anniversary of the festival of St. Anne, to whose shrine annual pilgrimages are made by the faithful in the

northern parts of the United States and in Canada for purposes quite similar to those which once attracted a host of bathers to the Maine beaches, with the difference that the Canadian shrine can show many visible tokens of its marvellous curative powers, to be seen of all men. A visitor to the little church of St. Anne, de Beaupré, remarks that "by far the most conspicuous feature of the place was a towering trophy of crutches and canes raised within the altar rail. These were of all sizes and shapes. Two fresh additions rested against the rail, where they had been left by their recovered owners."

Apparently authentic accounts of miracles, performed at this venerated shrine, appear from time to time in the Canadian newspapers. One of these relates, as a matter of news, that "a young girl named Marie Levesque, who had only walked with difficulty during the last two years, with the aid of crutches, was radically cured. The second case was that of a young Irish lad, who, on returning from the church to the boat which was to take him to Quebec,

suddenly threw away his crutch, exclaiming to one of his companions as he did so, 'Oh! I forgot to leave my crutch in the church.' 'But you will want it again,' was the reply. 'No, not at all: I have no longer any use for it.' And with that, he began walking about the deck, to all appearance as well as ever."

In addition to these cases, which come to us through reputable sources, the *Quebec Gazette* records the following: "A man named Renaud, who accompanied the party from St. James' parish on Saturday, and who for three years has had one side of his body completely paralyzed, was able on Sunday to walk out of church leaning on the arm of his brother. A farmer named Moulin, from Laprairie, who has been deaf for five years, fell on the floor apparently senseless, just as the officiating priest was pronouncing the benediction. He declared that when the priest raised his hands he could feel a touch upon his ear, and at the same moment, hearing the low tones of the Holy Father, fainted away from excess of joy.

He is said to have been in perfect possession of his sense of hearing on his return home. Another man, who had lost his sight through an attack of typhoid fever a year and a half ago, states that immediately after crossing himself with the holy water he was well able to see all that was going on. His name is Bruneau, and he is a Lavaltrie farmer."

The following cure for the croup was communicated to me by a very respectable farmer now deceased. After talking of various remedies for this dreaded scourge to young children, my informant observed that he knew a sure cure for it. Said he: "Take a live chicken, cut it open and take out the gizzard. Throw that into a basin of cold water and let it stay there. I know, for I've seen it tried; but the chicken must be alive after the operation."

Of a like nature was the advice given to a poor country woman who was dying of consumption, by one of those female charlatans who have so legitimately replaced the fear-

some witch doctors of the past. The patient was told that if she would swallow a live frog daily it would cure her. Poor creature! she had half the boys in the village catching frogs for her, and kept them in a tub in the cellar, where they could be handy. The treatment proved too heroic. She died.

It is a fact that touching for the King's Evil has been practised in New England as late as 1815, perhaps even later. By far the most remarkable instance of the possession of this power that has been recorded upon what seems like incontrovertible evidence, is that of Lieutenant William Robbe of Peterborough, New Hampshire.[1] One feature of his treatment, which no doubt served to draw many clients to him, was the practice of giving to each afflicted person a piece of silver. In fact, so many applied that the lieutenant was seriously interrupted in his legitimate occupations.

A Doctor Young, who in the account re-

[1] In "Farmer and Moore's Collections," i., 136.

ferred to is described as having been an eminent practitioner for more than forty years in the town, is said to have declared that infants afflicted with scrofulous diseases, tumors and the like, too obstinate to yield to medical aid, did unquestionably receive almost immediate relief from the healing hand of Lieutenant Robbe.

The wonderful healer continued to practise his semi-miraculous treatment until he was no longer able to raise his hands, but even then, so eager were the applicants, many of whom came from a distance, not to be disappointed, that the feeble hands were lifted for him to the sufferer's head.

In "Supernaturalism in New England," Mr. Whittier speaks of one Austin, a New Hampshire Quaker, who practised mental healing in his day. Those who were unable to visit him were treated by letter. In truth, there is no new thing under the sun.

VII

OF FATE IN JEWELS

WHAT are the supposed attributes of certain precious stones but another form of superstition? According to the popular lore on this subject, each gem has its peculiar virtue or virtues, with which the credulous owner becomes forthwith invested. Authorities differ so much, however, in regard to this mystical language that there cannot be said to be any settled standard of meaning. If, therefore, we refer only to such precious stones as have some superstition attached to them, we shall do all that comes within the range of our present purpose.

In "A Lover's Complaint," Shakespeare sets

forth, as understood in his day, "Each stone's dear nature, worth, and quality."

We accept, therefore, without reserve, as a starting point his *dictum* that —

> "paléd pearls, and rubies set in blood"

indicated two extremes of passion, namely, shrinking modesty and bold desire. He then goes on to describe the other symbolical gems thus: —

> "The diamond, why, 'twas beautiful and hard,
> Whereto his invised properties did tend;
> The deep green emerald in whose fresh regard
> Weak sights their sickly radiance do amend;
> The heaven-hued sapphire and the opal blend
> With objects manifold."

Those interested in the sale of gems have observed that most precious stones have their brief day of popular favor, regardless of any superstition connected with them. In other words, the popularity of certain jewels chiefly depends upon the public taste, for the time being. And the demand, therefore, fluctuates according as the particular stone is fashionable or unfashionable.

It would require a volume to give the subject fair treatment, so long is the list, and so abundant the material. Hardly a week goes by, however, in which some reference to the good or evil influence of this or that gem is not set forth in the public press, supported, too, by such an array of circumstantial evidence as to give color and authenticity to the story. The opal and the moonstone are the gems most often figuring in these tales. By turns the opal has borne a good and bad reputation; by turns it has been as fashionable as its rare beauty would seem of right to bespeak for it; and then again, owing to popular caprice or the sudden revival of some antiquated superstition, it has laid neglected in the jewellers' drawer for years.

The notion that the opal brings misfortune to the wearer is comparatively modern. Formerly, it was believed to possess great virtues as a talisman. In Ben Jonson's "New Inn," Ferret says;—

"No fern seed in my pocket; nor an opal
Wrapt in bay-leaf, in my left fist, to charm
Thine eyes withal."

In Jonson's and Shakespeare's time, the opal was justly prized for its quick changes of color, exhibiting, as it does, almost all of the hues of the rainbow in rapid succession. It is quaintly described in an account of that day as "a precious stone of divers colors, wherein appeareth the fiery shining of the carbuncle, the purple color of the amethyst, and the green shew of the emerald, very strangely mixed."

Quite naturally, dealers in gems have no patience with those superstitions unfavorable to the sale of their wares, although they show no particular dislike toward those of a different nature, if their sales are thereby increased. So when a customer asks for something synonymous with good luck, the obliging dealer usually offers him a moonstone, and after a little chaffering the buyer departs, possessed of a duly authenticated amulet, or charm. Agate is

another stone having, by common fame, the property of insuring long life, health, and prosperity to the wearer. The present Emperor of Germany is said, on good authority, to affect this stone. Now the ancient magician, who sold charms and love-philters to love-lorn swains, did no more than this, with the difference that he pretended to endow his nostrums with their supernatural powers by his own arts.

Indeed, the very word "charms" so innocently given to a bunch of jingling objects dangling from the belt or watch-chain, is itself indicative of a superstitious origin, to say the least.

As an example of the change wrought by the tyrant fashion in the supposed attributes of certain gems, the ruby was formerly considered the correct thing for an engagement ring, but that stone is now almost wholly superseded by the diamond for that highly interesting event; though the ruby continues to be regarded as a valuable gift upon other occasions, and if of a fine quality, is much more costly than a dia-

mond. Very possibly the familiar Biblical phrase, "for her price is far above rubies," spoken of the truly virtuous woman in Proverbs, may have suggested the peculiar fitness of this gem in a promise of marriage. If so, we can only regret the substitution.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation given for the present popularity of the diamond — it must, however, be a *solitaire* of the purest water — is that, as the diamond is the most durable substance known, so it is hoped that it may symbolize an enduring affection between the contracting parties. Though in itself nothing but a symbol or sign, the gift of an engagement ring is considered as evidence in a breach of promise case, thus showing that the very ancient custom in use among princes or noble personages of sending their signet-rings with messages of high importance, to give credit to the messenger, lives on in the spirit, if not in the actual letter, of the law, as applied to the sacred pledge of fidelity to one's promise to wed.

A very conscientious dealer once told me that if a young gentleman were to ask his advice concerning an engagement ring, he should dissuade the amorous youth from buying an emerald, on the ground that the young lady might regard it as a bad omen, possibly on account of its color which, as we have pointed out, is or was considered unlucky; but more probably, we think, because the emerald is said to be the chosen symbol of the "green-eyed monster," jealousy. An old jeweller readily confirms the opinion that many young ladies would be unwilling to accept an emerald at such a time; while still another adds that he never knew of one being given as an engagement gift. The novelist Black makes use of this superstition in his "Three Feathers," as something universally admitted, "for how," he naïvely asks, "could any two people marry who had engaged themselves with an emerald ring?"

Doctors disagree, however, as to the actual properties of this beautiful gem, as well as in

other things, for we find one authority saying that the emerald "discovers false witnesses, and ensures happiness in love and domestic felicity."

In justice, therefore, to this much abused stone, we must declare that our research thus far fails to confirm the odium sought to be cast upon it, in any particular; on the contrary, so far as we can find, not one jot or tittle of superstition attached to the emerald so long ago as when New England was settled. A learned writer of that time describes it as "a precious stone, the greenest of all other; for which it is very comfortable to the sight," and he adds, on the authority of Albertus Magnus, that "some affirm them (emeralds) to be taken out of Griffon's nests, who do keep this stone with great sedulity. It is found by experience that if the emerald be good, it inclineth the wearer to chastity."

It is therefore highly improbable, to say the least, that this article of superstitious faith came over in the *Mayflower*.

The turquoise has long proved a puzzle to the most experienced dealers in gems, on account of its singular property of changing color without apparent cause. Ordinarily it is of a beautiful blue — about the color of a robin's egg. This color sometimes changes to green, and again, though unfrequently, to white. In relating his experience with this stone to me, an old friend described his surprise as well as alarm at having a very valuble specimen, which was "beautifully blue" when put in the workman's hands to be set with diamonds, returned to him covered with a white film, nearly concealing the original blue color. As the turquoise itself was worth several hundred dollars, it really was a rather serious matter. The erratic stone, however, was put away in the safe. When the purchaser called for it on the following day, on its being taken out of the box, it was found that the true color had partly returned, one half of the stone being blue, and the other half white. "And we even fancied" con-

tinued my informant, "that we could see the color change as we watched it."

This change of color in the turquoise gave rise to the belief that its hue varied with the health of the wearer, it being blue when the wearer was in good health and green or white in the case of ill-health, or as put into verse: —

> "A compassionate turquoise that doth tell
> By looking pale the wearer is not well."

As coral is again becoming quite fashionable, we recall that it was once considered a sure protection against the Evil Eye, and is so still in Italy, where the little coral charm shaped like the hand, with the thumb and middle finger closed (a charm against witchcraft), comes from. It is also a more or less general belief that coral or red beads, worn round the neck, prevent nose-bleeding, on the principle, we suppose, that like cures like.

The carnelian, shaped in the form of a heart, was formerly much worn as an amulet.

The amethyst, as its Greek name implies, is

considered an antidote to intoxication. It has now a formidable rival in the gold-cure. There is an anecdote of the first Napoleon which affirms that he took a valuable amethyst from the crown in the coffin of Charlemagne. The stolen stone later came into the possession of Napoleon III., who wore it as a seal on his watch-guard. In his will he bequeathed the stone to his son as a talisman. On making her escape from Paris, in 1870, the empress took the historical stone with her.

The carbuncle was formerly believed to guard the wearer against the danger of breathing infectious air. It was also said to have the property of shining in the dark, like a burning coal, thus investing it, in the minds of the credulous, with supernatural power. This, be it said, was an Old-World superstition, which is referred to in some verses written by John Chalkhill (1649), describing a witch's cave: —

"Through which the carbuncle and diamond shine
Not set by art, but there by Nature sown
At the world's birth so star-like bright they shone."

But strangely enough, our forefathers found a similar belief existing among the Indians of New England, and what is more, these ignorant savages were able to convince the more civilized Englishmen of the truth of it.

According to these Indians, on the loftiest mountain peak, suspended from a crag overhanging a dismal lake, there was an enormous carbuncle, which many declared they had seen blazing in the night like a live coal; while by day it emitted blinding rays of light, dazzling to look upon. No mortal could hope to lay hands upon this gem, which was under the special guardianship of the genius of the mountain.

So ran the legend. It is believed to have inspired the earliest recorded journeys to the great White Mountains of New Hampshire, by adventurous whites. A reference to Sullivan's "History of Maine" shows that the story found full credence among certain of the ignorant settlers even in his day; and Hawthorne's grewsome tale of "The Great Carbuncle" is

founded upon this weird legend, so vividly recalling those of the Harz and the Caucasus.

It is noticeable that, in the matter of superstitions concerning gems, it is not the common people, but the wealthy who alone are able to gratify their desires. Everybody has heard of the Rothschild pearls. The Princess Louise of Lorne wears a ring of jet, as a preserver of health. M. Zola carries a bit of coral as a talisman against all sorts of perils by land or water; all of which goes to show that neither wealth nor station is exempt from those secret influences which so readily affect the poor and lowly.

VIII

OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Now for good lucke, cast an old shoe after me." — *Heywood.*

THE folk-lore of marriage is probably the most interesting feature of the general subject, to the tender sex, at least, with whom indeed none other, in the nature of things, could begin to hold so important a place. In consequence, all favorable or unfavorable omens are carefully treasured up in the memory, quite as much pains being taken to guard against evil prognostics as to propitiate good fortune.

Quite naturally, the young unmarried woman is possessed of a burning desire to find out who her future husband is to be, what he is like, whether he is rich or poor, short or tall, and if they twain are to be happy in the married state or not. To this end the oracle is duly

consulted, either openly or secretly, after the best approved methods.

One of the best known modes of divination is this: If, fortunately, you find the pretty little lady-bird bug on your clothes, throw it up in the air, repeating at the same time the invocation: —

"Fly away east and fly away west,
Show me where lives the one I love best."

All charms of this nature are supposed to possess peculiar power if tried on St. Valentine's day, Christmas Eve, or Hallowe'en. Curious it is that on a day dedicated to All the Saints in the Calendar, evil spirits, fairies, and the like are supposed to be holding a sort of magic revel unchecked, or that they should be thought to be better disposed to gratify the desires of inquisitive mortals on this day than on another. At any rate, calendar or no calendar, St. Matrimony is the patron saint of Hallowe'en.

Among the many methods of divination employed, a favorite one was to drop melted

lead into a bowl of water, though any other sort of vessel would do as well, and whatever form the lead might take would signify the occupation of your future husband. Or to go out of doors in the dark, with a ball of yarn, and unwind it until some one should begin winding it at the unwound end. At this trial, the expected often happened, as the enamored swain would seldom fail to be on the watch for his sweetheart to appear. So also the white of an egg dropped in water, and set in the sun, was supposed to take on the form of some object, such as a ship under full sail, indicating that your husband would be a sailor.

Burning the nuts is perhaps the most popular mode of trying conclusions with fate, as it certainly is the most mirth-provoking. On this interesting occasion, lads and lassies arrange themselves in a circle before a blazing wood fire, on the hearth. Nuts are produced. Each person, after naming his or her nut, puts it upon the glowing coals, with the unspoken invocation: —

"If he loves me, pop and fly,
If he hates me, live and die."

The poet Gay turns this somewhat differently, but it is not our affair to reconcile conflicting presages. He sings: —

"Two hazel nuts I threw into the flame,
And to each nut I gave a sweetheart's name,
This with the loudest bounce me sore amazed,
That in a flame of brightest color blazed:
As blazed the nut so may the passions grow,
For 'twas thy nut that did so brightly glow."

A still different rendering is given by Burns. According to him each questioner of the charm names two nuts, one for himself, one for his sweetheart, presumably the mode practised in Scotland in his time: —

"Jean slips in twa wi' tentie e'e;
Wha 'twas, she wadna tell;
But this is Jock, an' this is me,
She says in to hersel':
He blaz'd o'er her, an' she owre him,
As they wad never mair part;
'Till, fuff! he started up the lum,
An' Jean had e'en a sair heart
To see't that night."

Popping corn sometimes takes the place of burning the nuts. The spoken invocation is then "Pit, put, turn inside out!"

There are also several methods of performing this act of divination with apples. The one most practised in New England is this: First pare an apple. If you succeed in removing the peel all in one piece, throw it over your head, and should the charm work well, the peel will so fall as to form the first letter of your future husband's name, or as Gay poetically puts it: —

> "I pare this pippin round and round again,
> My shepherd's name to nourish on the plain:
> I fling th' unbroken paring o'er my head,
> Upon the grass a perfect L is read."

When sleeping in a strange bed for the first time, name the four posts for some of your male friends. The post that you first look at, upon waking in the morning, bears the name of the one whom you will marry. Care is usually taken to fall asleep on the right side of the bed.

By walking down the cellar stairs backward, holding a mirror over your head as you go, the

face of the person whom you will marry will presently appear in the mirror.

The oracle of the daisy flower, so effectively made use of in Goethe's "Faust," is of great antiquity, and is perhaps more often consulted by blushing maidens than any other. When plucking away the snowy petals, the fair questioner of fate should murmur low to herself the cabalistic formula: —

> "'He loves me, loves me not,' she said,
> Bending low her dainty head
> O'er the daisy's mystic spell.
> 'He loves me, loves me not, he loves,'
> She murmurs 'mid the golden groves
> Of the corn-fields on the fell."

As the last leaf falls, so goes the prophecy.

If you put a four-leaved clover in your shoe before going out for a walk, you will presently meet the one you are to marry. The same charm is used to bring back an absent or wayward lover. Consequently there is much looking for this bashful little plant at all of our matrimonial resorts. The rhymed version runs in this wise: —

"A clover, a clover of two,
Put it in your right shoe;
The first young man you meet,
In field, street, or lane,
You'll get him, or one of his name."

In some localities a bean-pod or a pea-pod put over the door acts as a charm to bring the favored of fortune to lift the latch and walk in. This is old. The poet Gay has it in rhyme thus: —

"As peascods once I pluck'd, I chanc'd to see
One that was closely filled with three times three;
Which when I cropp'd, I safely home convey'd,
And o'er the door the spell in secret laid: —
The latch moved up, when who should first come in,
But in his proper person — Lubberkin!"

Another mode of divination runs in this way: On going to bed the girl eats two spoonfuls of salt. The salt causes her to dream that she is dying of thirst; and whoever the young man may be that brings her a cup of water, in her dream, is the one she will marry.[1]

[1] Another way, laid down by some authorities, was that any unmarried woman fasting on Midsummer Eve, and at midnight laying a clean cloth with bread, cheese, and ale, and sitting

If after seeing a white horse you count a hundred, the first gentleman you meet will be your future husband.

So far as appearances go, at least, the custom of brewing love-philters or love-potions, to forestall or force the natural inclinations, has completely died out. From this source the astrologers, magicians, and fortune-tellers of former times reaped a rich harvest. Many instances of the use of this old custom occur in literature. Josselyn naïvely relates the only one we can call to mind, coming near home to us. He says: "I once took notice of a wanton woman's compounding the solid roots of this plant (Satyrion) with wine, for an amorous cup, which wrought the desired effect."

Would that the hideous and barbarous custom of administering poisons to gratify the cravings of hatred or the pangs of jealousy

down as if going to eat — the street door being left open — the person whom she is afterwards to marry will come into the room and drink to her by bowing, afterwards fill the glass, make another bow, and retire. — *Fielding.*

had become equally obsolete! But alas! the "green-eyed monster" is "with us yet."

It is a fact, well known to students of folk-lore, that those customs or usages relating to marriage are not only among the oldest, but have become too firmly intrenched in the popular mind to be easily dislodged. Thus, the ceremony of Throwing the Shoe continues to hold an honored place among marriage customs. In another place, it has been referred to as sometimes employed in the common concerns of life. But in the case of marriage, a somewhat deeper significance is attached to it. It is but fair to say, however, that authorities differ widely as to its origin, some referring it to the testimony of the Scriptures (Deut. xxv.), where the loosing of a shoe from a man's foot by the woman he has refused to marry, is made an act of solemn renunciation in the presence of the elders. Thereafter, the obdurate one was to be held up to the public scorn, and his house pointed at as "the house of him that hath his shoe loosed." So again we read in

Ruth of a man who plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his kinsman, as an evidence to the act of renunciation, touching the redeeming of land, and this, we are there told, was then the manner in Israel. Hence, it has been very plausibly suggested, especially by Mr. Thrupp, in "Notes and Queries," that throwing an old shoe after a bride was at first a symbol of renunciation of authority over her, by her father or guardian. However that may be, it is certain that no marriage ceremony is considered complete to-day without it, although there is danger of its being brought into ridicule, and so into disrepute, by such nonsensical acts as tying on old shoes to the bride's trunks, or to some part of her carriage, as I have seen done here in New England, the original design of the custom being lost sight of in the too evident purpose to make the wedded pair as conspicuous as possible, and their start on life's journey an occasion for the outbreak of ill-timed buffoonery.

In "Primitive Marriage" Mr. McLennan

thinks that throwing the shoe may be a relic of the ancient custom, still kept up among certain Hindu tribes, where the bride, either in fact or in appearance only, is forcibly carried off by the groom and his friends, who are, in turn, themselves hotly pursued and in good earnest pelted with all manner of missiles, stones included, by the bride's kinsfolk and tribesmen. This sham assault usually ends in the pursuers giving up the chase, — as, indeed, was intended beforehand, — and is probably a survival of the earliest of marriage customs, namely, that of stealing the bride, as recorded in ancient history. But this explanation is chiefly interesting as fixing the *status* of woman in those primitive days, when she was more like the slave of man than his equal. That relation is now so far reversed, however, that it is now the man who has become the humble suitor and declared servitor of womankind. So, at least, he insists. Now and then, though quite rarely, the old barbaric custom is recalled by the forcible abduction of some

unwilling victim by her rejected lover; but only in a few instances, so far as we know, has a bride been kidnapped and held to ransom, in this country, before being restored to her friends. The American Indians are known to have practised this custom of stealing the bride, quite after the manner described by Mr. McLennan as in vogue among the Hindus.

Even royalty itself must bow to the behests of old custom, as well as common mortals. When the Duke and Duchess of Albany left Windsor, while they were still within the private grounds, the bridegroom's three brothers and Princess Louise and Princess Beatrice ran across a part of the lawn enclosed within a bend of the drive, each armed with a number of old shoes, with which they pelted the "happy pair." The Duke of Albany returned the fire from the carriage with the ammunition supplied him by his friendly assailants, causing the heartiest laughter by a well-directed shot at the Duke of Edinburgh.

It was always reckoned a good omen if the sun shone on a couple when coming out of church. Hence the saying: "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on."

Every one knows, if not from experience, at least by observation, what self-consciousness dwells in a newly married pair — what pains they take to appear like old married folk, and what awkward attempts they make to assume the *dégagé* air of ordinary travellers. As touching this feature of the subject, I one day saw a carriage driven past me, at which every one stopped to look, and stare in a way to attract general attention, and after looking, gave a broad grin. The reason was apparent. On the back of the carriage was hung a large placard, labelled "Just Married." Several old shoes, besides some long streamers of cheap cotton cloth, were dangling from the trunks behind. When the carriage, thus decorated, drew up at the station, followed by a hooting crowd of street urchins, it was greeted with roars of laughter by the throng of idlers in

waiting, while the unconscious cause of it all first learned on alighting what a sensation they had so unwittingly created.

The custom of throwing rice over a bride, as an emblem of fruitfulness, also is very old, though in England it was originally wheat that was cast upon her head. The poet Herrick says to the bride,

"While some repeat
Your praise and bless you sprinkling you with wheat."

All the sentiment of this pretty and very significant custom is in danger of being killed by excess on the part of the performers, who so often overdo the matter as to render themselves supremely ridiculous, and the bride very uncomfortable, to say the least. To scatter rice, as if one were sowing it by the acre, when a handful would amply fulfil all the requirements of the custom, is something as if an officiating clergyman should pour a pailful of water on an infant's head, instead of sprinkling it, at a baptism.

It is not surprising that now and then cases arise where a newly married couple try to escape from the shower prepared for them by giving these over-zealous assistants the slip. A chase then begins corresponding somewhat to that just related of ignorant barbarians; and woe to the runaways if the pursuers should catch up with them!

The custom of furnishing bride-cake at a wedding is said to be a token of the firm union between man and wife, just as from immemorial time breaking bread has been held to have a symbolic meaning. The custom is centuries old. At first it was only a cake of wheat or barley. What it is composed of now, no man can undertake to say. That it is conducive to dreaming, or more probably to nightmare, few, we think, will care to dispute.

We learn that it was a former custom to cut the bride-cake into little squares or dice, small enough to be passed through the wedding-ring. A slice drawn through the ring

thrice (some have it nine times), and afterward put under the pillow, will make an unmarried man or woman dream of his or her future wife or husband. This is another of those old customs of which trial is so often made "just for the fun of the thing, you know!"

The *Charivari*, or mock serenade, is another custom still much affected in many places, notably so in our rural districts, though to our own mind "more honored in the breach than in the observance." The averred object is to make "night hideous," and is usually completely successful. In the wee sma' hours, while sleeping peacefully in their beds, the newly wedded pair are suddenly awakened by a most infernal din under their windows, caused by the blowing of tin horns, the thumping of tin pans, ringing of cowbells, and like instruments of torture. To get rid of his tormentors the bridegroom is expected to hold an impromptu reception, or, in other words, "to treat the crowd," which is more often the real object

of this silly affair, to which we fail to discover one redeeming feature.

The custom of wearing the wedding ring upon the left hand originated, so we are told, in the common belief that the left hand lay nearest to the heart.

As is well known, the Puritans tried to abolish the use of the ring in marriage. According to Butler in "Hudibras":—

> "Others were for abolishing
> That tool of matrimony — a ring
> With which the unsatisfied bridegroom
> Is married only to a thumb."

The times have indeed changed since in the early days of New England no Puritan maiden would have been married with a ring for worlds. When Edward Winslow was cited before the Lord's Commissioners of Plantations, upon the complaint of Thomas Morton, he was asked among other things about the marriage customs practised in the colony. He answered frankly that the ceremony was performed by magistrates. Morton, his accuser, declares that

the people of New England held the use of a ring in marriage to be "a relic of popery, a diabolical circle for the Devell to daunce in."

The first marriage in Plymouth Colony, that of the same Edward Winslow to Susannah White, was performed by a magistrate, as being a civil rather than a religious contract. From this time to 1680, marriages were solemnized by a magistrate, or by persons specially appointed for that purpose, who were restricted to particular towns or districts. Governor Hutchinson, in his history of Massachusetts, says he believes "there was no instance of marriage by a clergyman during their first charter." If a minister happened to be present, he was desired to pray. It is difficult to assign the reason why clergymen were excluded from performing this ceremony. In new settlements, it must have been solemnized by persons not always the most proper for that purpose, considering of what importance it is to society, that a sense of this ordinance, at least in some degree sacred, should be maintained and preserved.

The first marriage solemnized at Guilford, Connecticut, took place in the minister's house. It is not learned whether he performed the ceremony or not. The marriage feast consisted wholly of pork and beans. As time wore on, marriages became occasions of much more ceremony than they were fifty or sixty years ago. During the Revolutionary period, and even later, the bride was visited daily for four successive weeks.

A gold wedding-ring is accounted a sure cure for sties.

If the youngest daughter of the family should be married before her older sisters, they must all dance at her wedding in their stockings-feet, if they wish to have husbands.

It is strongly enjoined upon a bride, when being dressed for the marriage ceremony, to wear, —

> "Something old and something new,
> Something borrowed and something blue,
> And a four-leaved clover in her shoe."

June is now at the height of popularity as

the month of all months to get married in, for no other reason that I can discover, than that it is the month of roses, when beauty and plenty pervade the fair face of nature.

It is now the custom for the bride, if she is married at home, or on returning there from church, to throw away her bouquet for the guests to scramble for. The one getting the most flowers will be married first, and so on.

Giving wedding presents was not practised before the present (nineteenth) century.

One old marriage custom, though long since obsolete, may be briefly alluded to here, not only for its singularity, but for its suggestiveness touching a state of mind that would admit of such tomfoolery. This was the so-called Smock-marriage, in which the bride went through the ceremony standing only in her shift, thereby declaring herself to be possessed of no more than she came into the world with. On being duly recorded, the act exempted the husband from liability for his

wife's debts previously contracted. If she went through this ridiculous performance in the presence of witnesses, and in the "King's Highway," that is to say, the lawfully laid out public road, she thereby cleared herself from any old indebtedness. As amazing as it may seem, several such cases are recorded in New England, the formalities observed differing somewhat in different localities.

It is considered unlucky to get married before breakfast.

"If you marry in Lent,
You will live to repent."

May is considered an unlucky month to be married in.

"Marry in May,
And you'll rue the day."

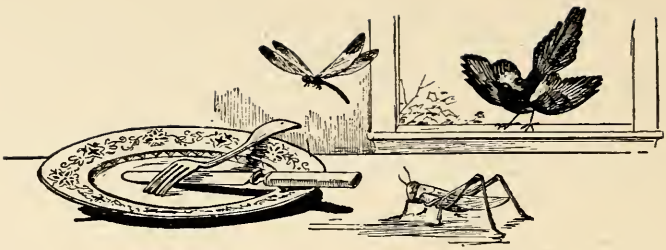
To remove an engagement or wedding ring from the finger is also a bad omen.[1] To lose either of them, or to have them broken on the finger, also denotes misfortune.

It is extremely unlucky for either the bride

[1] A reference to this is found in Cooper's "Spy."

or groom to meet a funeral when on their way to be married.

It is an unlucky omen for the church clock to strike during the performance of a marriage ceremony, as it is said to portend the death of one of the contracting parties before the year is out.



IX

OF EVIL OMENS

"A woman's story at a winter's fire." — *Macbeth.*

WE come now to those things considered as distinctly unlucky, and to be avoided accordingly. How common is the peevish exclamation of "That's just my luck!" Spilling the salt, picking up a pin with the point toward you, crossing a knife and fork, or giving any one a knife or other sharp instrument, are all deemed of sinister import now, as of old.

One must not kill a toad, which, though

"ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head,"

or a grasshopper, possibly by reason of the veneration in which this voracious little insect was held by the Athenians, whose favorite symbol it was, although it is now outlawed, and a price set upon its head as a pest, to be ruthlessly exterminated, by some of the Western states. So, too, with the warning not to kill a spider, against which, nevertheless, the housemaid's broom wages relentless war. If, on the contrary, you do not kill the first snake seen in the spring, bad luck will follow you all the year round. Be it ever so badly bruised, however, the belief holds fast in the country that the reptile will not die until sunset, or with the expiring day,

"That like a wounded snake drags its slow length along."

The peacock's feathers were supposed to be unlucky, from an old tradition associating its gaudy colors with certain capital sins, which these colors were held to symbolize. Nevertheless, this tall and haughty feather has been much the fashion of late years as an effective

mantel ornament, showing how reckless some people can be regarding the prophecy of evil.

Getting married before breakfast is considered unlucky. It would be quite as logical to say this of any other time of the day; hence unlucky to get married at all, though it is not believed all married people will cordially subscribe to this heresy.

May is an unlucky month to be married in. So, also

> "If you marry in Lent
> You will live to repent."

Old Burton says, "Marriage and hanging go by destiny; matches are made in heaven."

Getting out of bed on the wrong side bodes ill luck for the rest of the day. A common remark to a person showing ill-humor is, "I guess you got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning." It has in fact become a proverb.

To begin dressing yourself by putting the stocking on the left foot first would be trifling with fortune. I know a man who would not do

so on any account. It is also unlucky to put a right foot into a left-hand shoe, or *vice versa*. These are necessary corollaries of the "right-foot-foremost" superstition.

According to that merry gentleman, Samuel Butler: —

> "Augustus having b'oversight
> Put on his left shoe for his right,
> Had like to have been slain that day,
> By soldiers mutining for their pay."

Cutting the finger nails on the Sabbath is a bad omen. There is a set of rhymed rules for the doing of even this trifling act. Apparently, the Chinese know the omen, as they do not cut the nails at all.

Of the harmless dragon-fly or devil's darning-needle, country girls say that if one flies in your face it will sew up your eyes.

In some localities I have heard it said that if two persons walking together should be parted by a post, a tree, or a person, in their path, something unlucky will surely result —

> "Unless they straightway mutter,
> 'Bread and butter, bread and butter.'"

Low, the pirate, would not let his crew work on the Sabbath, not so much, we suppose, from conscientious scruples, as for fear it would bring him bad luck. The rest of the Decalogue did not seem to bother him in the least.

After having once started on an errand or a journey, it is unlucky to go back, even if you have forgotten something of importance. All persons afflicted with frequent lapses of memory should govern themselves accordingly. This belief seems clearly grounded upon the dreadful fate of Lot's wife.

It was always held unlucky to break a piece of crockery, as a second and a third piece shortly will be broken also. This is closely associated with the belief respecting the number three, elsewhere referred to. In New England it is commonly said that if you should break something on Monday, bad luck will follow you all the rest of the week.

To stumble in going upstairs is also unlucky; perhaps to stumble at any other time. Friar Lawrence says, in "Romeo and Juliet," —

"They stumble that run fast."

Two persons washing their hands in the same basin or in the same water will quarrel unless the sign of the cross be made in the water.

It is considered unlucky to take off a ring that was the gift of a deceased person, an engagement, or a marriage ring.

The term "hoodoo," almost unknown in the Northern United States a few years ago, has gradually worked its way into the vernacular, until it is in almost everybody's mouth. It is, perhaps, most lavishly employed during the base-ball season, as every one knows who reads the newspapers, to describe something that has cast a spell upon the players, so bringing about defeat. The term is then "hoodooing." The hoodoo may be anything particularly ugly or repulsive seen on the way to the game — a deformed old woman, a one-legged man, a lame horse, or a blind beggar, for instance. Most players are said to give full credit to the power of the hoodoo to bewitch them. Indeed, the term has been quite widely taken up as the synonym for bad luck, or, rather, the cause of

it, even by the business world. If this is not, to all intents, a belief in witchcraft, it certainly comes very close to what passed for witchcraft two hundred years ago.

This vagrant and ill-favored word "hoodoo" is, again, a corruption of the voudoo of the ignorant blacks of the South, with whom, in fact, it stands, as some say, for witchcraft, pure and simple, or, perhaps, the Black Art, as practised in Africa; while others pronounce it to be a religious rite only. More than this, the voudoo also is a mystic order, into whose unholy mysteries the neophyte is inducted with much barbaric ceremony. In the case of a white woman so initiated in Louisiana, this consisted in the elect chanting a weird incantation, while the novitiate, clad only in her shift, danced within a charmed circle formed of beef bones and skeletons, toads' feet and spiders, with camphor and kerosene oil sprinkled about it. All those present join in the dance to the accompaniment of tom-toms and other rude instruments, until physical exhaustion compels the dancers to stop.

In its main features we find a certain resemblance between the voudoo dance of the ignorant blacks and the ghost dance practised by some of the wild Indians of the West, and by means of which they are wrought up to the highest pitch of frenzy, so preparing the way for an outbreak, such as occurred a few years ago with most lamentable results.

While the sporting fraternity is notoriously addicted to the hoodoo superstition, yet it is by no means confined to them alone. Not long ago a statement went the rounds of the newspapers to the effect that the superstitious wife of a certain well-known millionnaire had refused to go on board of their palatial yacht because one of the crew had been fatally injured by falling down a hatchway. In plain English, the accident had hoodooed the ship.

But the power of the hoodoo would seem not to be limited to human beings, according to this statement, taken from the columns of a reputable newspaper: "A meadow at Biddeford, Maine, is known as the hoodoo lawn, for the

reason that rain follows every time it is mowed, before the grass can be cured. It is said that this has occurred for twenty-five consecutive years."

To break the spell of the hoodoo, it is as essential to have a mascot, over which the malign influence can have no power, as to have an antidote against poisons. Therefore most ball-players carry a mascot with them. Sometimes it is a goat, or a dog, or again a black sheep, that is gravely led thrice around the field before the play begins.

It is not learned whether or not the different kinds of mascot have ever been pitted against each other. Perhaps the effect would be not unlike that described by Cicero in his treatise on divination. He says there that Cato one day met a friend who seemed in a very troubled frame of mind. On being asked what was the matter, the friend replied: "Oh! my friend, I fear everything. This morning when I awoke, I saw, shall I say it? a mouse gnawing my shoe." "Well," said Cato, re-

assuringly, "calm yourself. The prodigy really would become frightful if the shoe had been gnawing the mouse."

Naval ships often carry a goat, or some other animal, as a mascot, in deference to Jack's well-known belief in its peculiar efficacy; and in naval parades the goat usually gravely marches in the procession, and comes in for his share of the applause. Simple-minded Jack christens his favorite gun after some favorite prize-fighter. And why not? since the great Nelson, himself, carried a horse-shoe nailed to his mast-head, and since even some of our college foot-ball teams bring their mascots upon the field just like other folk.

The war with Spain could hardly fail of bringing to light some notable examples of the superstitions of sailors concerning mascots. The destruction of Admiral Cervera's fleet, off Santiago de Cuba, by the American fleet, under command of Admiral Sampson, is freshly remembered. One of the destroyed Spanish ships was named the *Colon*. Twenty-six days

after the battle, the tug-boat *Right Arm* of the Merritt-Chapman Wrecking Company visited the *Colon*, for the purpose of raising the Spanish cruiser. The only living thing aboard was a black and white cat. For nearly a month it had been the sole crew and commander of the wrecked battle-ship.

The crew of the *Right Arm* took possession of the cat, adopted it as a mascot and named it Tomas Cervera. But Cervera brought ill luck. When Lieutenant Hobson raised the *Maria Teresa* the rescued cat was placed aboard her, to be brought to America.

The *Maria Teresa* never reached these shores, and when the vessel grounded off the Bahamas the cat fell into the hands of the natives. He was rescued the second time, and at last reached America, a passenger on the United States repair ship *Vulcan*.

It will be admitted that this cat did not belie that article of the popular belief, which ascribes nine lives to his tribe. But poor Tomas Cervera did not long survive the vari-

ous hardships and perils to which he had been subjected. He gave up the ghost shortly after all these were happily ended.

Speaking of ships and sailors, it is well known to all sea-faring folk that the reputation of a ship for being lucky, or unlucky, is all important. And this reputation may begin at the very moment when she leaves the stocks. Should she, unfortunately, stick on the ways, in launching, a bad name is pretty sure to follow her during the remainder of her career, and to be an important factor in her ability to ship a crew. Even the practice of christening a ship with a bottle of wine is neither more nor less than a survival of pagan superstition by which the favor of the gods was invoked.

The superstition regarding thirteen persons at the table also boasts a remarkable vitality. Just when or how it originated is uncertain. It has been surmised, however, that the Paschal Supper was the beginning of this notion, for there were thirteen persons present then, and what followed is not likely to be forgotten.

It has, perhaps, been the subject of greater ridicule than any other popular delusion, probably from the fact of its touching convivial man in his most tender part, — to wit, the stomach. In London some of the literary and other lights even went to the trouble of forming a Thirteen Club for the avowed purpose of breaking down the senseless notion that if thirteen persons were to sit down to dinner together, one of them would die within a twelvemonth. The motto of this club should have been, "All men must die, therefore all men should dine." If the club's proceedings showed no lack of invention and mother wit, we still should very much doubt their efficacy toward achieving the avowed end and aim of the club's existence, for surely such extravagances could have no other effect than to raise a laugh. We reproduce an account of the affair for the reader's amusement: —

"At the dinner of the club, above mentioned, there were thirteen tables, a similar number of guests being seated at each table. The serving

of the meal was announced by the "shivering" of a mirror placed on an easel, a ceremony performed by two cross-eyed waiters! Having put on green neckties and placed a miniature skeleton in their button-holes, the guests passed under a ladder into the dining room. The tables were lighted with small lamps placed on plaster skulls; skeletons were suspended from the candles, which were thirteen in number on each table; the knives were crossed; the salt-stands were in the shape of coffins, with headstones bearing the inscription, 'In memory of many senseless superstitions, killed by the London Thirteen Club, 1894.' The salt-spoons were shaped like a grave-digger's spade.

"After the dinner was fairly started, the chairman asked the company to spill salt with him, and later on he invited them to break looking-glasses with him, all of which having been done, he presented the chairmen of the different tables with a knife each, on condition that nothing was given for them in return. An undertaker, clothed in a variety costume, which

would have done credit to a first-class music hall, was then introduced 'to take orders,' but he was quickly shuffled out of the room."

These unbelieving jesters, who so audaciously defied the fatal omen, did not seem to realize that a popular superstition is not to be laughed out of existence in so summary a manner. Equally futile was the attempt to put it to a scientific test, as, if tried by that means, it appears that, of any group of thirteen persons, the chances are about equal that one will die within the year. Therefore, the attempt to break the spell by inviting a greater number of persons could have the effect only of increasing, rather than diminishing, the probability of the event so much dreaded.[1]

It has been stated in the newspapers, from which I take it, that there are many hotels in New York which contain no room numbered thirteen. There are other hotels and office buildings wherein the rooms that are so numbered cannot be leased except once in a great while. In

[1] Quetelet, on the calculation of probabilities.

large hotels one custom is to letter the first thirteen rooms and call them parlors. Another custom is simply to skip the unpopular number, and call the thirteenth room "No. 14." A man who had just rented an office which bears the objectionable number, in a down-town building, asserts that though he has no superstitious dread of the number, he finds that others will not transact business with him in that office. I also find it stated as a fact that the new monster passenger steamship *Oceanic* has no cabin or seat at the table numbered thirteen.

It was again instanced as a deathblow to a certain candidate's hopes of a reëlection to the United States Senate, that repeated ballotings showed him to be just thirteen votes short of the required number. From the same state, Pennsylvania, comes this highly significant announcement in regard to a base-ball team: "Because the team left here on a very rainy day, and on a train that pulled out from track No. 13, the superstitious local fans (*sic*) are in a sad state of mind to-night, regarding the coincidence

as an evil omen." Again the small number of six, in the graduating class of a certain high school, was gravely referred to as owing to there having originally been thirteen in that class.

At the same time there are exceptions which, however, the superstitious may claim only go to prove the rule. For instance the Thirteen Colonies did not prove so very unlucky a venture.

As regards the superstitions of actors and actresses, the following anecdote, though not new, probably as truly reflects the state of mind existing among the profession to-day as it did when the incident happened to which it refers. When the celebrated Madame Rachel returned from Egypt in 1857, she asked Arsène Houssaye, within a year thereafter, the question: "Do you recollect the dinner we had at the house of Victor Hugo? There were thirteen of us, — Hugo and his wife, you and your wife, Rebecca and I, Girardin and his wife, Gerard de Nerval, Pradier, Alfred de Musset, Perrèe, of the *Siècle*, and the Count d'Orsay, thirteen in all. Well, where are they

to-day? Victor Hugo and his wife are in Jersey, your wife is dead, Madame de Girardin is dead, my sister Rebecca is dead, De Nerval, Pradier, Alfred de Musset, and D'Orsay are dead. I say no more. There remain but Girardin and you. Adieu, my friends. Never laugh at thirteen at a table."

The world, however, especially that part of it represented by diners out, goes on believing in the evil augury just the same. A dinner party is recalled at which two of the invited guests were given seats at a side table on account of that terrible bugbear "thirteen at table." When mentioning the circumstance to a friend, he was reminded of an occasion where an additional guest had been summoned in haste to break the direful spell.

Unquestionably, the newspapers might do much toward suppressing the spread of superstition by refusing to print such accounts as this, taken from a Boston daily paper, as probably nothing is read by a certain class with greater avidity. It says "that engine No. 13

of the Boston, Hoosac Tunnel & Western Railroad has, within three weeks, killed no less than three men. The railway hands fear the locomotive, and say that its number is unlucky." It is true, we understand, that the standard number of a wrecked locomotive, that has been in a fatal accident, is not unfrequently changed in deference to this feeling on the part of the engine-men.

It is held to be unlucky to pass underneath a ladder, an act which indeed might be dangerous to life or limb should the ladder fall. But it is even harder to understand the philosophy of the *dictum* that to meet a squinting woman denotes ill luck.

The bird was formerly accounted an unlucky symbol, perhaps from the fact that good fortune, like riches, is apt to take to itself wings. The hooting of an owl, the croaking of a raven, the cry of a whip-poor-will, and even the sight of a solitary magpie were always associated with malignant influences or evil presages. Poe's raven furnishes

the theme for one of his best-known poems. And the swan was long believed to sing her own death-song. Be that as it may, the fact is well remembered that a ring, bearing the device of a bird upon it, or any other object having the image of the feathered kind, was not considered a suitable gift to a woman. That article of superstition, like some others that could be mentioned, has vanished before the resistless command of fashion, so completely indeed, that birds of every known clime and plumage have since been considered the really proper adornment for woman's headgear.

There is, however, an odd superstition connected with the magpie, an instance of which is found related by Lord Roberts, in "Forty-one Years in India." We could not do better than give it in his own words: "On the 15th July Major Cavagnari, who had been selected as the envoy and plenipotentiary to the Amir of Kabul, arrived in Kuram. I, with some fifty officers who were anxious to do honor

to the envoy and see the country beyond Kuram, marched with Cavagnari to within five miles of the crest of Shutargardan pass, where we encamped, and my staff and I dined that evening with the mission. After dinner I was asked to propose the health of Cavagnari and those with him, but somehow I did not feel equal to the task: I was so thoroughly depressed, and my mind filled with such gloomy forebodings as to the fate of these fine fellows, that I could not utter a word.

"Early next morning the Sirdar, who had been deputed by the Amir to receive the mission, came into camp, and soon we all started for the top of the pass. . . . As we ascended, curiously enough, we came across a solitary magpie, which I should not have noticed had not Cavagnari pointed it out and begged me not to mention the fact of his having seen it to his wife, as she would be sure to consider it an unlucky omen.

"On descending to the (Afghan) camp, we

were invited to partake of dinner, served in the Oriental fashion on a carpet spread on the ground. Everything was done most lavishly and gracefully. Nevertheless, I could not feel happy as to the prospects of the mission, and my heart sank as I wished Cavagnari good-by. When we had proceeded a few yards in our different directions, we both turned round, retraced our steps, shook hands once more, and parted forever."

The sequel is told in the succeeding chapter. "Between one and two o'clock on the morning of the 5th of September, I was awakened by my wife telling me that a telegraph man had been wandering around the house and calling for some time, but that no one had answered him. The telegram told me that my worst fears had been only too fully realized." Cavagnari and his party had been massacred by the Afghans.

Again, there are certain things which may not be given to a male friend (young, unmarried ministers excepted), such, for example, as

a pair of slippers, because the recipient will be sure, metaphorically speaking, to walk away from the giver in them.

There is also current in some parts of New England a belief that it is unlucky to get one's life insured, or to make one's will, under the delusion that doing either of these things will tend to shorten one's life. This feeling comes of nothing less than a ridiculous fear of facing even the remote probability involved in the act; and is of a piece with the studied avoidance of the subject of death, or willing allusion in any way, shape, or form to the dead, even of one's own kith and kin, quite like that singular belief held by the Indians which forbade any allusion to the dead whatsoever.

Spilling the salt, as an omen of coming misfortune, is one of the most widespread, as well as one of the most deeply rooted, of popular delusions. It is said to be universal all over Asia, is found in some parts of Africa, and is quite prevalent in Europe and America to-day. Vain to deny it, the unhappy delinquent who

is so awkward as to spill salt at the table instantly finds all eyes turned upon him. Worse still, the antidote once practised of flinging three pinches of salt over the left shoulder is no longer admissible in good society. Instantly every one present mentally recalls the omen. His host may politely try to laugh it off, but all the same, a visible impression of something unpleasant remains.

Something was said in another place about the potency of the number "three" to effect a charm either for good or for evil. Firemen and railroad men are more or less given to the belief that if one fire or one accident occurs, it will inevitably be followed by two more fires or accidents. A headline in a Boston newspaper, now before me, reads, "The same old three fires in succession," and then hypocritically exclaims, "How the superstitious point to the recurrence!"

The superstition about railroad accidents is by no means confined to the trainmen, or other employees, but to some extent, at least, is shared

even by the higher officials, who point to their past experiences in the management of these iron highways as fully establishing, to their minds, certain conditions. One of these gentlemen once said to me, after a bad accident on his road, "It is not so much this one particular accident that we dread, as what is coming after it." I also knew of a conductor who asked for a leave of absence immediately after the occurrence of a shocking wreck on the line..

Although periodically confronted with a long series of most momentous events in the world's history that have happened on that day of the week, the superstition in regard to Friday, as being an unlucky day, has so far withstood every assault. It will not down. Whether it exists to so great an extent as formerly may be questioned, but that it does exist in full force, more especially among sailors, is certain. We have it on good authority that this self-tormenting delusion grew out of the fact that the Saviour was crucified on Friday, ever after

stigmatized as "hangman's day," and, therefore, set apart for the execution of criminals, now as before time.

It is not wholly improbable that some share of the odium resting upon Friday may arise from the fact of its being so regularly observed as a day of fasting, or at least *maigre*, by some religionists.

In some old diaries are found entries like the following: "A vessel lost going out of Portland against the advice of all; all on board, twenty-seven, drowned." It is easy to understand how such an event would leave an indelible impression upon the minds of a whole generation.

Notwithstanding the belief is openly scouted from the pulpit, and is even boldly defied by a few unbelieving sea-captains, the fact remains that there are very many sober-minded persons who could not be induced on any account to begin a journey on Friday. There are others who will not embark in any new enterprise, or begin a new piece of work on that day; and

still others who even go so far as to say that you must not cut your nails on Friday. A man could be named who could not be tempted to close a bargain on any other day of the week than Thursday. It is a further fact, which all connected with operating railroads will readily confirm, that Friday is always the day of least travel on their lines. This circumstance alone seems conclusive as to the state of popular feeling. Apparently a brand has been set upon the sixth day of the week for all time.

Numerous instances might be given to show that men of the strongest intellect are as fallible in this respect as men of the lowest; but one such will suffice. Lord Byron once refused to be introduced to a lady because it was Friday; and on this same ill-starred day he would never pay a visit.

"See the moon through the glass,
You'll have trouble while it lasts."

This warning couplet is still a household word in many parts of New England. It has been observed that even those sceptical persons

who profess to put no faith in it whatever, generally take good care to keep on the right side of the window-glass. As bearing upon this branch of the general subject an incident is related by a reputable authority, as having occurred at a party given, not many years ago, by a gentleman holding a considerable station in life. It is therefore repeated here word for word.

"In the midst of a social chat, at the close of the day, a footman rather briskly entered the drawing-room, and walked up to the back of the chair of the hostess and whispered something in her ear; she immediately closed her eyes and gave her hand to the man, and was forthwith led by him from the room. The guests were rather astonished, but after the lapse of a few moments the lady returned and resumed her seat.

"Her sudden departure having occasioned a rather uneasy pause in the conversation, she felt it necessary to state the cause of her singular conduct. She then told us that the New

Harvest Moon had just made its appearance, and it was her custom to give a crown to any of her servants that first brought the information to her when that event occurred; and that the reason why she closed her eyes, and was led by the footman out of the room to the open air, was that she might avoid the evil consequences that were sure to happen to her if she obtained her first glimpse of the Harvest Moon through a pane of glass. This lady was highly accomplished, and possessed remarkable sagacity upon most subjects, but was nevertheless a slave to a groundless fear of evil befalling her if she saw this particular New Moon in any other way than in the open air."

It is passing strange, however, that the gentle and beautiful Queen of the Night should have been mostly associated with a malignant influence. Juliet pleads with Romeo not to swear by the "inconstant moon." The traditional witch gathers her simples only by the light of the moon, as at no other time do they possess the same virtues to work miracu-

lous cures or potent spells. It is also an old belief that if a person goes to sleep with the moonbeams shining full upon his uncovered face, he will be moonstruck, or become an idiot. I well remember to have seen the officer of the watch awaken a number of sleepers, who had taken refuge on the deck of a vessel from the stifling heat below. Milton speaks of

> "Moping melancholy
> And moonstruck madness,"

which has become incorporated with the language under the significant nickname of "luny."

When we consider the already long list of material or immaterial objects threatening us with dire misfortune, the wonder is how poor humanity should have survived so many dangers ever impending over it like the sword of Damocles. Really, we seem "walking between life and death." The catalogue is, however, by no means exhausted. A picture, particularly if it be a family portrait, falling down from the wall, bodes a death in the family, or at least

some great misfortune. This incident, somewhat startling, it must be confessed, to weak nerves, has been quite effectively used in fiction.

Notwithstanding it is the national color of Ireland, green has the name of being unlucky. More strange still is the statement made by Mr. Parnell's biographer that the famous Irish leader could not bear the sight of green. Queer notion this, in a son of the Emerald Isle! Mr. Barry O'Brien goes on to say that Parnell "would not pass another person on the stairs; was horror-stricken to find himself sitting with three lighted candles; that the fall of a picture in a room made him dejected for the entire afternoon; and that he would have nothing to say to an important bill, drawn up by a colleague, because it happened to contain thirteen clauses." It is added that the sight of green banners, at the political meetings he addressed, often unnerved him.

The singular actions of a pet cat have recently gained wide currency and wider com-

ment in connection with the ill-fated steamer Portland, which went down with all on board, during the great gale of November 27, 1898. Not a soul was left to tell the tale. It was remarked that puss came off the boat before the regular hour for sailing had arrived, and though she had never before been known to miss a trip, she could not be called or coaxed back on board, and the doomed craft therefore sailed without her. As a matter of fact, it has been noticed that in times of great disasters, like that just related, superstition that has lain dormant for a time, always shows a new vigor, and finds a new reason for being.

In the course of my rambles along the New England coast, I found many people holding to beliefs of one sort or another, who hotly resented the mere suggestion that they were superstitious. The quaint and curious delusions which have become ingrained in their lives from generation to generation, they do not regard in that light. For one thing they believe that if a dead body should remain in the house over

Sunday, there will be another death in the family before the year is out.

The ticking of the death-watch, once believed to forebode the approaching dissolution of some member of the family, so terrifying to our fathers and mothers, is now, fortunately, seldom heard or little regarded. While the superstition did prevail, there was nothing so calculated to strike terror to the very marrow of the appalled listeners as the noise of this harmless little beetle, only a quarter of an inch long, tapping away in the decaying woodwork of an ancient wainscot.

There is no end of legendary matter concerning clocks. Sometimes nervous people have been frightened half out of their wits at hearing a clock that had stopped, suddenly strike the hour. Clocks have been known to stop, too, at the exact hour when a death took place in the house. But even more startling was an instance, lately vouched for by reputable witnesses, of a clock, of the coffin pattern, of course, from which the works had been removed,

playing this same grewsome trick. The first case might be accounted for, rationally, by some fault in the mechanism, or some rusty spring suddenly set in motion; but all theories necessarily fail with clocks without works. Admonitions or warnings are often associated with clocks, as has been noticed in connection with marriage customs. And the mystical relation between time and eternity is often brought to mind by the stopping of the watch in a drowned person's pocket, or the relation of some curious legend like the following, without comment or qualification, in a reputable newspaper: —

"There is a curious legend about the old clock, which is to be superseded by a new one, at Washington, Pennsylvania. It is stated that about twenty years ago a person was hung in the courtyard. The clock, which had always tolled out the hour regularly, stopped at the hour of two o'clock, being the hour at which the drop fell that sent the unfortunate into eternity. Since that time, many aver, the clock has never struck again."

So, also, the howling of a dog, either by day or by night, under a sick person's window, is to this day held by the weak-minded to portend the death of that person. Some writers think they have traced this belief to the symbolism of ancient mythology, where the dog stands for the howling night-wind, on which the souls of the dead rode to the banks of the Styx, but this hypothesis seems quite far-fetched.

The winding-sheet in the candle is another self-tormenting belief of evil portent, now happily gone out with the candle.

Then again, to pass from this subject, a single case of nosebleed often excites the liveliest fears on the part of nervous people, on account of a very old belief that it was a sure omen of a death taking place in the family. Not long ago the following choice morsel met my eye while reading in a book: "Our steward has this moment lost a drop of blood, which involuntarily fell from his pug nose. 'There,' said he, 'I have lost my mother — a good friend.'"

Breaking a looking-glass denotes that a death will take place in the family within the year. This mode of self-torture is supposed to derive its origin from the great use formerly made of mirrors by magicians and other obsolete impostors in carrying on their mystical trade. Astrologers also made use of the looking-glass in practising the art of divination or foretelling events, probably by means of some such cunning contrivances as are now employed with startling effects by our own "wizards" and "necromancers." Quite naturally the innocent glass itself came to be looked upon by the ignorant with superstitious awe, and the breaking of one as the sure forerunner of calamity. We do not think, however, that this old superstition is by any means as widely prevalent as it once was.

It is pleasing to chronicle the total disappearance of that terrible bugaboo, the Evil Eye, which so long kept our ancestors in a state of nervous apprehension fearful to contemplate. It is now only perpetuated by a saying. So

with that other equally repulsive belief in the efficacy of touching a dead body, as a means of convicting a suspected murderer by the fresh bleeding from the wound. Both of these superstitions were fully accepted by the first settlers of New England, and perhaps also in other of the colonies. John Winthrop relates a very harrowing case of infanticide, in which this monstrous test was put in practice to convict the erring mother.[1] The superstition is said to be of German origin.

The following very curious piece of superstition is found in Colonel May's Journal of his trip to the Ohio, early in the century. It seems that a man had fallen into the river and was drowned before help could reach him. The following method was employed to recover the body. First they took the shirt which the drowned man had last worn, put a whole loaf of good, new bread, weighing four pounds, into

[1] May Martin was made to touch the face of her dead child (murdered by her to prevent a discovery), the fresh blood came forth, "whereupon she confessed."

it, and tied it up carefully into a bundle. The bundle was then taken in a boat to the place where the man had fallen in, a line and tackle attached to it, and then set afloat on the water. The rescuers said that the bread would float until it should come directly over the body, when it would sink and thus discover the location of the dead man. Unfortunately, the line was not long enough, so that when the loaf filled with water and sank, the tackle disappeared with it.

X

OF HAUNTED HOUSES, PERSONS, AND PLACES

"Three times all in the dead of night,
A bell was heard to ring." — *Tickell.*

HAUNTED houses have proved an insuperable stumbling-block to those wiseacres who no sooner insist that superstition has died out than the familiar headline in the daily paper, "A haunted house," stares them full in the face. It is believed that many such houses stand tenantless to-day because of the secret fear they inspire in the minds of the timid or superstitious, who, quite naturally, shrink from living under the same roof with disembodied

spirits. It has already been noted that M. Camille Flammarion is a firm believer in haunted houses. Here is what he has to say upon that much debated subject: —

"There is no longer any room to doubt the fact that certain houses are haunted.

"I began the scientific studies of these questions on November 15, 1861, and I have continued it ever since. I have received more than four thousand letters upon these questions from the learned men of every land, and I am glad to be able to say that some of the most interesting letters come from America."

For every haunted house there must, of course, be an invisible intruder who comes only in the small hours, when the effects of its unwelcome presence would, of course, be most terrifying to weak nerves. But it is to be remarked that we hear nothing nowadays of the old-time, hair-raising, blood-curdling ghost whose coming forebode something terrible about to happen, or who had some awful revelation to make. That type of ghost has

passed away. The modern ghost never makes set speeches in a sepulchral voice or leaves a palpable smell of brimstone behind. It comes rather in a spirit of mischief-making, shown in such petty annoyances as setting the house bells ringing, overturning articles of furniture, twitching the bedclothes from off a sleeping person in the coldest of cold nights, putting out the lights, or making a horrible racket, first in one room, then in another, as if it revelled in pure wantonness of purpose. In short, there is no limit to the ingenious deviltries perpetrated by this nocturnal disturber of domestic peace and quiet.

After two or three sleepless nights, followed by days of quaking apprehension, the occupants usually move out, declaring that they would not live in the house if it were given to them. And so it stands vacant indefinitely, shunned by all to whom its evil reputation has become known, a visible monument of active superstition.

That all these things have happened as

lately as in this year of grace (1900) is too well known to be denied. And as most people would desire to shun publicity in such a matter, there are probably very many cases that never reach the public eye at all. One such is reported of a family at Charlestown, Massachusetts, being disturbed by strange noises, as of some one pounding on the walls or floors at all hours of the night. Even the police, when summoned, failed to lay hands on the invisible tormentor, who, like the ghost in Hamlet, was here, there, and nowhere in a jiffy.

One of the most singular cases that have come to my knowledge, perhaps because the unaccountable disturbances happened in the daytime, whereas they habitually occur only in the night-time, when churchyards are supposed to yawn, was that of a haunted schoolhouse. This was downright bravado. If we do not err, in this case a bell was repeatedly rung during the regular sessions, by no visible agency, to the amazement of both teachers and scholars. After a vain search for the cause, the school-

house was shut up, and so remained for a considerable time, a speechless but tangible witness to the general belief that the devil was at the bottom of it all.

Not many generations ago, when ghosts were perhaps more numerous than at present, there were professional exorcists who could be hired to clear the premises of ghosts or no pay; but this is now a lost art. As Shakespeare says:—

> "No exorciser harm thee!
> Nor no witchcraft charm thee!
> Ghost unlaid forbear thee!"

While upon this interesting subject it may be instructive to know what our ancestors sometimes suffered from similar visitations. We take the following extract from Ben Franklin's *New England Courant*, of 1726:—

"They write from Plymouth, that an extraordinary event has lately happened in that neighborhood, in which, some say, the Devil and the man of the house are very much to blame. The man it seems, would now and then in a frolic call upon the Devil to come down the

chimney; and some little time after the last invitation, the goodwife's pudding turned black in the boiling, which she attributed to the Devil's descending the chimney, and getting into the pot upon her husband's repeated wishes for him. Great numbers of people have been to view the pudding, and to inquire into the circumstances; and most of them agree that so sudden a change must be produced by a preternatural power. However, 'tis thought it will have this good effect upon the man, that he will no more be so free with the Devil in his cups, lest his Satanic Majesty should again unluckily tumble into the pot."

But houses are by no means the only things subject to these astounding visitations. Dark and secluded ponds, thick swamps, and barren hillsides often bear that unsavory reputation to-day, it may be from association with some weird tale or legend, or mayhap because such places seldom fail, of themselves, to produce a certain effect upon an active imagination. Let any such person, who has ever been lost in some

thick forest, recall his sensations upon first making the unwelcome discovery. The solemn old woods then seem all alive with —

> "The dim and shadowy armies of our unquiet dreams,
> Their footsteps brush the dewy fern and print the shaded streams."

As regards haunted ships, the following incident, taken down as literally as I could transcribe it at the time, from the lips of a seafaring friend, speaks for itself: —

"'Twas some dozen year ago, may be less, may be more — beats all how time travels when you've turned the half-century post — I was aboard of the old *Paul Pry* — queer name, now, warn't it? We was a lyin' in Havana harbor, all snug, about a mile from shore. Well, the mate he was on watch. In port, you know, ships always keep slack watch. Our'n was light, nothin' in her, hold all swep' out clean that very day, 'cause we was to begin takin' in sugar and molasses in the mornin'. All hands were off in the ship's boat visitin' another ship — all 'cept the steward. The old man, he was ashore.

"I'm slow, but you just hold your hosses. All to once't the mate thought he heern somebody walkin' back'ards and for'ards plumb down in the hold. He walked to the open hatch and called down, 'Who's there?' No answer. He listened. No sound. Thinkin' it might possibly have been the steward getting his firewood, the mate went for'ard to the steward's room to see if it was so, and found him fast asleep in his bunk. That settled it. Nobody aboard but them two.

"The mate he said nothin' to nobody, but got a lantern and slipped quietly down the ladder into the hold, determined to find out who was skylarkin' there, for I tell you the mate he was a game one all the time, and don't you b'leeve he warn't!

"He hunted high and low, from the forepeak to the run, but not a soul was to be seen anywhere; but just as soon as he stood still he would hear those myster'ous footsteps go trampin' fore and aft, fore and aft, as plain as day, right by him, where he stood.

"By this time the mate had got pretty well worked up, I want you to know, so he just gin one kinder skeered look around him, and then hustled himself off up that ladder just a leetle mite faster than he came down, wonderin' to himself what it all could mean, and thinkin' all sorts of things to once't.

"Then he went and woke up the steward, and both on 'em went and listened fust at one hatch, then at t'other, and sure enough that consarned tramp, tramp, tramp, was a-goin' on agin just the same as before. Then they pulled on the hatches. But, Lor' bless you, it warn't no use. Them critters down below had the bulge on 'em every time.

"The mate he said nothin' 'cept to the old man, who looked as black as a new-painted deadeye with the lanyards unrove when he heerd it; but somehow it leaked out among the crew before we sailed, and one or two ran away and laid low till the ship was clean out of the harbor.

"It was gen'lly b'leeved fore and aft that them

there footsteps was a warnin'. Hows'ever, the thing quieted down some in a day or two, so nothin' more was heerd of the walkin' match down below; but on the third day out, I think it was, we was struck by one of them northers, and in spite of all we could do we was drove ashore on a reef off the Bermudys, where the *Paul Pry* brought up all standin', and there she left her old bones. The wreckers they came and took off the crew, and fetched 'em all safe into Nassau. Now if that ship warn't haunted, I miss my guess. You can't most always tell about them things, I know; but ef it was sky-larkin', all I've got to say is, it was a purty neat job, and don't you forget it."

There are also places, as well as houses, which have the reputation of being haunted, sometimes through the commission of a horrible crime in that particular locality, sometimes through the survival of some obscure local tradition. It matters not. Once give the place a bad name, and local tradition preserves the memory of it for many generations. Every

schoolboy is familiar with the weird legend of Nix's Mate, a submerged island at the entrance to Boston Harbor, where pirates were formerly hung in chains. Appledore Island, on the coast of New Hampshire, once had the name of being haunted by the uneasy ghost of one of Captain Kidd's piratical crew. The face of the spectre was said by those who had seen it, or who thought they had seen it, to be dreadful to behold, and the neck to bear the livid mark of the hangman's noose. Once, no islander could be found hardy enough to venture himself on Appledore after dark. Indeed, such places of fearsome reputation are found all over New England. For example, there is the shrieking woman of Marblehead, a remarkable spook, who at certain intervals of time could be heard uttering the most heartrending cries for mercy to her inhuman murderers. Then, again, there is the legend of Harry Main, reputed pirate and wrecker, who, by means of false lights, decoyed simple mariners to destruction on the shoals of Ipswich Bar, to which for his many crimes the

wretch was doomed to be chained down to the fatal spot to which he had lured his unsuspecting victims.[1]

Quite naturally these legends mostly cluster about the seacoast, but now and then one is found in the interior. One corner of the town of Chester, New Hampshire, lifts into view an eminence known as Rattlesnake Hill, one rocky side of which is pierced entirely through, thus forming a cavern of great notoriety in all the country round. This cavern is known as the Devil's Den, and many were the frightful stories told around winter firesides of the demons who, of yore, haunted it, and who, all unseen of mortal eyes, there held their midnight orgies within the gloomy recesses of the mountain.

There are two entrances to this cavern, both leading to an interior, subterranean chamber, whose vaulted roof is thickly studded with pear-shaped protuberances that are said to shine and sparkle when the flame of a torch

[1] For more about these places see "New England Legends."

sheds a ruddy glow upon them. According to popular tradition the path leading to the cavern was always kept open, summer and winter. Many years ago the poet Whittier put the legend into verse: —

"'Tis said that this cave is an evil place —
The chosen haunt of a fallen race —
That the midnight traveller oft hath seen
A red flame tremble its jaws between,
And lighten and quiver the boughs among,
Like the fiery play of a serpent's tongue:
That sounds of fear from its chambers swell —
The ghostly gibber, — the fiendish yell;
That bodiless hands at the entrance wave —
And hence they have named it the Demon's Cave."

The persistent life of such local traditions as these fully attests to the belief of former generations of men in the active agency of the Evil One in human affairs. And not only this, but this omnipresent devil has actually left his mark, legibly stamped, in so many places, and his name in so many others, that to doubt his actual presence were not only unreasonable but ungenerous. Even his footprints are found

here and there, yet strange to say, few represent a cloven foot. The sonorous names, Devil's Pulpit and Devil's Cartway, are found within a few miles of each other on the coast of Maine. Moreover, do we not know from a perusal of the testimony given at the celebrated witchcraft trials, that the arch-fiend had been both seen and spoken with *in propria persona?*

It used to be a not uncommon threat with quick-tempered people to say that if their wishes or expectations were not gratified to their liking, they would "haunt you" when they died. I myself have often heard this expression used either in jest or in earnest; and when used it never failed to leave a disagreeable impression on the listener.

It is not a great many years ago since an account was telegraphed all over the country, and duly appeared in the daily newspapers, of an honest citizen, a resident of one of the largest towns in Pennsylvania, whose wife "while yet in good health, frequently admonished her friends that she did not wish her body to be

buried in a certain wet graveyard. She threatened to 'speak to them' if her wish was not granted, and went so far as to tell them how she would haunt them by coming back in ghostly form. The wife died, and her body was buried in the graveyard she had disliked. Now, strange as it may appear, her husband alleges that, since the funeral took place, she has appeared at his bedside several times each week, always looking at him, and always making motions with her bony hands, as a mark of her displeasure. The husband says he is unable to sleep, and also that he is sure the strange midnight visitor is none other than his wife. He declares that whatever other people may think of it, he himself firmly believes that he has brought the enmity of the spirit upon himself and children by their refusal to grant the wife's last request. The children's beds are also visited by her, as they say, and as a consequence the family is kept in constant alarm. One of the nearest neighbors has also seen the 'spook' several times, and corroborates the

family in every particular. The terrified husband relates the facts himself, and it is the responsibility of the man that warrants publishing his story of the appearance of the spook. He gives the account of the strange happenings in a straightforward manner, which impresses a person with its truth, and he further says it is not imagination, a dream, or an attack of nightmare, but that the spook always comes when he is wide awake. The women and children of the neighborhood are in great terror, and the people hardly venture out of doors after dark."

Upon the heels of this experience comes the following telegram to the Associated Press, thus disseminating, through its thousand channels, superstition broadcast: —

[" Copyright, 1899, by The Associated Press.]

"London, March 4, 1899. Another link in the chain of illfortune which has followed the famous Newstead Abbey was forged this week. It seems that a curse rests on the

abbey, and that the eldest has never succeeded to the estate.

"Byron sold it to Col. Wildman in 1808, who died childless. The trustees sold it to Webb, the famous sportsman, whose eldest son died this week. Byron had the skull which was reported to have belonged to the ghost that haunted the abbey, and he used it as a punch bowl. Webb buried the skull, hoping to lay the ghost."

As related to the general subject, it is too well known that certain persons to-day profess the power of conversing with disembodied spirits, to need more than a passing reference to this particular form of belief, which some hold to as firmly as to an article of religious faith, while others consider it a delusion or worse. Forty odd years ago spirit rappings convulsed society from one end of the country to the other. Spiritual séances were vehemently denounced from the pulpit, and while fully reported also by the press, the mediums

were charged with being rank impostors, humbugs, and the like. Alleged exposure followed exposure. Yet somehow the belief, such as it is, has contrived to outlive ridicule, calumny, and persecution — the common lot of every new and startling departure from the older beliefs — until to-day it has acquired not only the right to live, but also that of calm discussion.

Dr. Samuel Johnson once asked the pertinent question, "If moral evil be consistent with the government of the Deity, why may not physical evil be consistent with it?" The solemn declaration that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations, sometimes recurs to us with startling force, more especially when the awful anathema is brought so near home to us as it is by the following veracious incident.[1]

There is a certain well-known locality in Essex County, Massachusetts, which has long borne the evil reputation of being haunted,

[1] Partly taken from Felt's "Annals of Ipswich," partly from the relations of others.

owing to the tradition that a cruel murder was committed there. According to some of the old people from whom I had the story, strange sights and sounds have been both seen and heard near the spot where the crime took place. For instance, a child would be heard crying out most pitifully, though nothing could be seen. One belated horseman positively declared that when passing this accursed place he had seen a child's coffin moving along the road, as he moved; and that the spectre followed him almost into the town of Ipswich. It is said to be a fact that many of the old folks were afraid to pass this place of dread after dark.

As to the origin of the story, with its highly dramatic features, accounts differ somewhat; but considerable pains have been taken to arrive at the truth, since it is a matter of general notoriety in the neighborhood referred to, although the actual facts may have no relation whatever to the "skeleton in the closet" disclosed by the story itself.

The story goes back to colonial times, and chiefly has to do with the two daughters of a family in good social standing. These young women had for a serving-maid a negro slave, who was treated with marked severity by her haughty mistresses.

In time, the slave woman bore a child. Angered at the coming of the luckless little waif, the cruel sisters resolved to put it out of the way. One day the mother found it hid away in a hogshead of flax, in the garret. Failing in this attempt, the sisters then took the child, stuck pins into its veins, and tried to smother it between two feather beds. When the infant was thought to be quite dead, the body was thrown into a brook, under a nearby bridge which spanned it. Life, however, was not quite extinct, so that the child's cries were heard by a passing traveller, who rescued it, but it soon after bled to death from the wounds inflicted upon it.

Half crazed by this dastardly act, the forlorn mother then and there called down the curse of

God upon the inhuman sisters and their sons to all future generations.

This is substantially the legend. Now for the sequel. It is said to be a fact that all the sons of the daughters of that family, and no others, have ever since been afflicted with a strange and incurable malady, the principal feature being a tendency to profuse bleeding from the most trifling cuts or wounds. After some days have elapsed, a mere scratch will begin to bleed copiously and so continue until the sufferer has lost so much blood that in some cases it is said he has bled to death. From this circumstance the persons so afflicted are known by the name of "bleeders."

Mr. Felt asserts that the family in which this singular hemorrhage first appeared brought it with them from England, which, if true, would summarily dispose of the legend; but his statement does not accord with the story as told on the spot. It is here related as it was told to me.

Reference was earlier made to the old-time,

respectable ghost of our fathers, who like the ghost in Hamlet, made his unwelcome appearance only to subserve the ends of justice. This practical generation hardly realizes, we think, how lately the ghost was accepted in that character, or how trustworthy his evidence was deemed by the purveyors of public intelligence. On turning over the files of the *New England Weekly Journal* of December 1, 1729, we came across the following ghost story, here reproduced *verbatim* : —

"Last week, one belonging to Ipswich came to Boston and related that some time since he was at Canso in Nova Scotia, and that on a certain day there appeared to him an apparition in blood and wounds, and told him that at such a time and place, mentioning both, he was barbarously murdered by one, who was at Rhode Island, and desired him to go to the said person and charge him with the said murder, and prosecute him therefor, naming several circumstances relating to the murder; and that since his arrival from Canso to Ipswich

the said apparition had appeared to him again, and urged him immediately to prosecute the said affair. The abovesaid person having related the matter was advised and encouraged to go to Rhode Island and engage therein, and he accordingly set out for that place on Thursday last." [1]

Dr. Timothy Dwight, in his "Travels," records, with approval, the following singular superstition relative to the barberry, which is so common in New England. "This bush," he remarks, "is, in New England, generally believed to blast both wheat and rye. Its blossoms, which are very numerous, and continue a considerable time, emit very copiously a pungent effluvium believed to be so acrimonious as to injure essentially both these kinds of grain.

[1] The rule, as laid down by Cotton Mather in "More Wonders" was this: "When there has been a murder committed, an apparition of the slain party accusing of any man, altho' such apparitions have oftner spoke true than false, is not enough to convict the man of that murder; but yet it is a sufficient occasion for Magistrates to make a particular inquiry," etc.

"In Southborough, a township in the county of Worcester, a Mr. Johnson sowed with rye a field of new ground. At the south end of this field also grew a single barberry bush. The grain was blasted throughout the whole length of the field, on a narrow tract commencing at the bush and proceeding directly in the course, and to the extent, to which the blossoms were diffused by the wind."

Certes, that was a most extraordinary belief held by the simple country folk in a certain quiet corner of New England, that candles made of the tallow obtained from a dead body, would, when lighted, render the person carrying them invisible; and furthermore that a lighted candle of this description, if placed within a bedroom, would effectually prevent a sleeping person from waking until it should be extinguished. This I had from the lips of a most intelligent and estimable lady, who knew whereof she spoke.

I confess that on hearing this statement I realized that I had now found more than I

was looking for. But incredible as it may seem at first, all doubts were set at rest by the following article found among some fragments of old superstition in a certain treatise on that subject. Here is the article verbatim: —

"The Hand of Glory is a piece of foreign superstition common in France, Germany, and Spain; and is a charm used by housebreakers and assassins. It is the hand of a hanged man, holding a candle made of the fat of a hanged man, virgin wax, and siasme of Lapland. It stupefies those to whom it is presented, and renders them motionless, insomuch that they could not stir, any more than if they were dead."

I do not find any recent mention of the appearance of that ancient bugbear known as the Will-o'-the-wisp, or magical Jack-o'-lantern, associated with the unearthly light sometimes seen flitting about ancient graveyards. Science has practically accounted for this natural phenomenon to the general acceptance; but science has not yet been able to do away with

the instinctive dread with which the vicinity of a graveyard is associated in most minds. I well remember how, when a lad, I dreaded to pass a graveyard after dark. There was a sickly feeling of something lurking among those ghostly looking tombstones. I looked another way. I whistled, I looked behind me. Vain effort! I ran from the spot as if all the ghosts my fears had conjured up were close at my heels.

XI

OF PRESENTIMENTS

"Methinks I hear, methinks I see
Ghosts, goblins, fiends." — *Burton.*

WE approach a still different class of evil omens, or such as are believed by many to "cast their shadows before," in such a manner as to prey upon the spirits, or show their visible effects in the daily actions of men, usually well balanced, with a feeling akin to respectful fear. Let other forms of superstition be never so mirth-provoking, the reality of this one, at least to those of an

imaginative or highly impressible nature, is such that we are sobered at once. What concerns such momentous events as life and death is really no jesting matter.

There may be, probably is, a scientific explanation for those fancies that sometimes come over us, with a sinking feeling at the heart. Men usually keep silent. Women more often give utterance to their feelings. How many times have we heard this remark: "O dear, I feel as if something was going to happen!"

There is still another phase of the subject. Probably hundreds, perhaps thousands, could be found, who, at some time or other, have passed through some strange experience, which they are wholly unable to account for on any rational theory or ground whatever. Perhaps it has been to the inner man what the skeleton in the closet is to the family home. Unfortunately, it is only in moments when men lay bare their inmost thoughts to each other that these things, so valuable from the

standpoint of psychology, leak out. What is, then, the secret power, which, in our waking hours, our sober consciousness, is able to oppress our spirits like some hideous nightmare? In its nature it seems most often a warning of coming evil or future event, — in fact, an omen of which we obtain the knowledge by accident, or without design or premeditation. Were it not for the fear of ridicule, we are persuaded that a multitude of persons could testify to some very interesting phenomena of this kind, drawn from their own experiences.

There was a woman whom I knew very well, in a little seaport of Maine, a respectable, middle-aged matron, who asserted that no one ever died in that village unless she had a warning. Precisely what the nature of that warning was she would never divulge; but it is nevertheless a fact that she was often consulted by her neighbors when any one was taken seriously ill, and that her oracular dictum received full and entire credit among them.

In that same little seaport the superstition is current that a sick person will not die till ebb tide. As that goes out, so does the life. This particular article of superstitious faith still holds in some parts of England, we understand, and is made use of by Dickens in "David Copperfield."

The following incident came to my knowledge while I was in the near neighborhood of the place where a recent shocking railroad accident had happened. Naturally, it was the one topic of conversation, far and near. The engine-man, an old and trusted servant of the company, went down with his engine in the wreck. While being dug out from under his engine, crushed and bleeding, the poor fellow said to his rescuers: "Three times I've seen a man on the track at this very place, and three times I've stopped my engine. I said this morning that I wouldn't go over the road again; but couldn't get any one to take my place, and here I am."

That a sinister presentiment should cross

one in moments of extreme peril, may be easily conceived, but why it should occur, and does occur, at times when no known danger threatens, or any mental or physical condition would seem to warrant it, is not so easily understood. Yet history is full of such examples, related, too, not of the weaker sort, but of the strongest characters. Mr. Motley, in his "John of Barneveld," gives a vivid picture of Henry IV. of France just before his death. The great monarch was on the point of departure, at the head of the best appointed army he had ever commanded, for the war against Spain. "But he delayed for a few days to take part in the public festivities in honor of the coronation of his queen. These festivities he dreaded, and looked forward to them with gloomy forebodings. He was haunted with fears that they involved his own life, and that he should not survive them. He said many times to his favorite minister, Sully: 'I know not how it is, but my heart tells me that some misfortune is to

befall me. I shall never go out of it.' He had dreams, also, which assumed to him the force of revelations, that he was to die in a carriage, and at the first magnificent festival he gave. Sully asked him why he did not abandon the proposed festivities at the coronation, and actually went to the queen to persuade her to countermand them. But she refused in high indignation, being, as is now supposed, in the conspiracy against his life. The result is well known: the king was assassinated in his carriage by Ravaillac, as the festivities were in progress."

Every one remembers the curious incident in regard to Lord Thomas Lyttleton's vision, as related in Boswell's "Johnson," predicting the time of his death, and its exact fulfilment; and Johnson's solemn comments thereon. "It is the most extraordinary thing that has happened in my day. I heard it with my own ears from his uncle, Lord Westcote." Lord Byron once observed that several remarkable things had happened on his birthday, as they

also had to Napoleon. Marie Antoinette, too, was a firm believer in these presentiments. She thus declares herself in language that now seems prophetic: "At my wedding something whispered to me that I was signing my death warrant. At the last moment I would have retreated if I could have done so."

Our early New England historian, Winthrop, mentions a singular case of presentiment of death, experienced by one Baker, of Salem. This man, on going forth to his work, in the morning, told his wife he should never see her more. He was killed by a stick of timber, falling upon him, that same day.

It is quite true that we do not attach nearly as much importance to events happening a long time ago as to those occurring in our own day; for one thing, perhaps, because they do not seem so easy of verification; for another, because we choose to believe that they merely reflect the ignorance of a past age. That there is really no difference in the susceptibility of man to such premonitions, so

long as he shall be the creature of feeling, is proved by the most irrefragable testimony. The poet Whittier, who took a peculiar delight in the legendary tales of New England, has related one or two incidents that came within his own knowledge, to this effect. "A very honest and intelligent neighbor of mine," says the narrator, "once told me that at the precise moment when his brother was drowned in the Merrimack River, many miles distant, he felt a sudden and painful sensation — a death-like chill upon the heart, such as he had never before experienced. And," adds the poet, "I have heard many similar relations."

The following, he says, "are the facts," relative to another incident that happened in his vicinity. "In September, 1831, a worthy and highly esteemed inhabitant of this town (Haverhill, Mass.) died suddenly on the bridge over the Merrimack, by the bursting of a blood-vessel. It was just at daybreak, when he was engaged with another person in raising the draw of the bridge for the passage of a sloop.

The suddenness of the event, the excellent character of the deceased, and above all, a vague rumor that some extraordinary disclosure was to be made, drew together a large concourse at the funeral. After the solemn services were concluded, Thomas, the brother of the dead man — himself a most exemplary Christian — rose up and desired to relate some particulars regarding his brother's death. He then stated — and his manner was calm, solemn, impressive — that more than a month previous to his death, his brother had told him that his feelings had been painfully disturbed by seeing, at different times on the bridge, a quantity of human blood; that sometimes while he was gazing upon it, it suddenly disappeared, as if removed by an invisible hand; . . . that many times in the dusk of the evening, he had seen a vessel coming down the river, which vanished just as it reached the draw; and that, at the same time, he had heard a voice calling in a faint and lamentable tone, 'I am dying!' and that the

voice sounded like his own: that then he knew the vision was for him, and that his hour of departure was at hand. Thomas, moreover, stated that a few days before the melancholy event took place, his brother, after assuring him that he would be called upon to testify to the accounts which he had given of the vision on the bridge, told him that he had actually seen the same vessel go up the river whose spectral image he had seen in his vision, and that when it returned the fatal fulfilment would take place."

Though of still earlier date, the remarkable premonition of Rev. Samuel Newman, of Rehoboth, will bear being repeated here. According to his biographer, he not only felt a certain presage of the approach of death, but seemed to triumph in the prospect of its being near. Yet he was apparently in perfect health, and preached a sermon from Job xiv. 14, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come." In the afternoon of the following Lord's Day, he asked the deacon to

pray with him, saying he had not long to live. As soon as he had finished his prayer he said the time was come when he must leave the world; but his friends seeing no sign of approaching dissolution, thought it was merely the effect of imagination. Immediately he turned away, saying, "Angels, do your office!" and expired on the spot.

Lord Roberts of Kandahar relates the following of himself: "My intention, when I left Kabul, was to ride as far as the Khyber Pass; but suddenly a presentiment, which I have never been able to explain to myself, made me retrace my steps and hurry back toward Kabul — a presentiment of coming trouble which I can only characterize as instinctive.

"The feeling was justified when, about halfway between Butkhak and Kabul, I was met by Sir Donald Stewart and my chief of the staff, who brought me the astounding news of the total defeat by Ayab Khan of Brigadier-general Burrows's brigade at Malwand, and of Lieutenant-general Primrose, with the re-

mainder of his force, being besieged at Kandahar." [1]

Most people are familiar with the story told by President Lincoln to a friend, — told too, in his own half-playful, half-pathetic way, as if to minimize the effect upon that friend's mind. It is given in the words of that friend: —

"It was just after my election in 1860, when the news had been coming in thick and fast all day and there had been a great 'hurrah, boys,' so that I was well tired out and went home to rest, throwing myself down on a lounge in my chamber. Opposite where I lay was a bureau with a swinging glass upon it (and here he got up and placed furniture to illustrate the position), and looking in that glass I saw myself reflected nearly at full length; but my face, I noticed, had *two* separate and distinct images, the tip of the nose of one being about three inches from the tip of the other. I was a little bothered, perhaps startled, and got up and looked in the glass, but the illusion vanished.

[1] "Forty-one Years in India."

On lying down again, I saw it a second time, plainer if possible, than before; and then I noticed that one of the faces was a little paler — say, five shades — than the other. I got up, and the thing melted away; and I went off, and in the excitement of the hour forgot all about it — nearly, but not quite, for the thing would once in a while come up and give me a little pang, as if something uncomfortable had happened. When I went home again that night, I told my wife about it, and a few days afterward I made the experiment again, when (with a laugh), sure enough! the thing came again; but I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that, though I once tried very industriously to show it to my wife, who was somewhat worried about it. She thought it was a 'sign' that I was to be elected to a second term of office, and that the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the last term."

These are by no means isolated cases. It is said that General Hancock, who had faced the

King of Terrors on too many battle-fields to fear him, was pursued by a presentiment of this sort, only too soon to be fully verified. While present as an honored guest at a dinner, surrounded by his old comrades in arms, the general remarked to a friend that he had come there with a premonition that it would be his last visit, and that he had but a short time longer to live. In fact, his lamented death occurred within a short time after.

Instances of fatal presentiments before going into battle are familiar to every veteran of our great Civil War. I have heard many of them feelingly rehearsed by eye-witnesses. The same thing has occurred, under precisely similar conditions, during the late war with Spain. But here is a tale of that earlier conflict, as published broadcast to the world, without question or qualification: —

"In a research for facts bearing upon psychology, Mrs. Bancroft (a daughter-in-law of the historian) has brought to light a strange story relating to either the record of odd 'spirit communications' or coincidences. On July 2,

1863, the wives of Major Thomas Y. Brent and Captain Eugene Barnes, two Confederate officers, were together at a wedding in Fayette County, each wearing her bridal dress. While dressing for the occasion Mrs. Brent's companion discovered a blood spot upon the dress of the major's wife, which could not be accounted for, and somewhat excitedly exclaimed, 'It is a bad omen!' Two days after Mrs. Brent experienced a severe pain in the region of her heart, although at the time in the best of health. This occurred at the birthplace of her husband. Two days later she heard that, while storming a Federal fortification, her husband was killed on July 4, 1863, as far as she could learn, at the identical time that she had experienced the heart pain. The major was shot in the breast by a Minié ball and instantly killed."

There lies before me, as I write, the authoritative statement of an army officer, a survivor of the terrible charge up San Juan Hill, before Santiago de Cuba, to the effect that just before advancing to the charge a brother officer had

confided to him a conviction that the speaker would be killed, entreating his friend to receive his last messages for his relatives. In this case, too, the fatal premonition was fully verified. The doomed man was shot while bravely storming the Spanish stronghold.

Still another story of this war has been widely published, so lately as this chapter was begun. It has reference to the death of the bandmaster of the United States ship *Lancaster*, then cruising in the South Atlantic. Upon learning that the *Lancaster* was to touch at Rio de Janeiro the bandmaster requested his discharge, giving as his reason that he had for years been under the presentiment that if he went to that port he would die of yellow fever. A discharge was refused him. The ship entered the harbor of Rio, and the bandmaster immediately took to his bed with all the symptoms of yellow fever. The identity of the malady soon established itself. He was taken to the plague hospital on shore and there died. One of the bandsmen who kissed him as he was being removed from

the ship also died. The account goes on to say that "these two are the only cases reported at Rio for months. The fever has not spread, and no man besides the unfortunate bandsman caught the fever, the health of the ship's crew remaining excellent."

The number of persons who have testified to having seen the apparitions or death wraiths of dying or deceased friends is already large, as the records of various societies for psychical research bear witness. These phenomena are not in their nature forewarnings of something that is about to happen, but announcements of something that already has happened. They therefore can have no relation to what was formerly known as "second sight."

In spite of all that our much-boasted civilization has done in the way of freeing poor, fallible man from the thraldom of superstition, there is indubitable evidence that a great many people still put faith in direct revelations from the land of spirits. In the course of a quiet chat one evening, where the subject was under

discussion, one of the company who had listened attentively, though silently all the while, to all manner of theories, spiced with ridicule, abruptly asked how we would account for the following incident which he went on to relate, and I have here set down word for word:—

"My grandparents," he began, "had a son whom they thought all the world of. From all accounts I guess Tom was about one of the likeliest young fellows that could be scared up in a day's journey. Everybody said Tom was bound to make his mark in the world, and at the time I speak of he seemed in a fair way of doing it, too, for at one and twenty he was first mate of the old *Argonaut* which had just sailed for Calcutta. This would make her tenth voyage. Well, as I am telling you, the very day after the *Argonaut* went to sea, a tremendous gale set in from the eastward. It blew great guns. Actually, now, it seemed as if that gale would never stop blowing.

"As day after day went by, and the storm raged on without intermission, you may judge

if the hearts of those who had friends at sea in that ship did not sink down and down with the passing hours. Of course, the old folks could think of nothing else.

"Let me see; it was a good bit ago. Ah, yes; it was on the third or fourth night of the gale, I don't rightly remember which, and it don't matter much, that grandfather and grandmother were sitting together, as usual, in the old family sitting-room, he poring over the family Bible as he was wont to do in such cases, she knitting and rocking, or pretending to knit, but both full of the one ever present thought, which each was trying so hard to hide from the other.

"Dismally splashed the raindrops against the window-panes, mournfully the wind whined in the chimney-top, while every now and then the fire would spit and sputter angrily on the hearth, or flare up fitfully when some big gust came roaring down the chimney to fan the embers into a fiercer flame. Then there would be a lull, during which, like an echo of

the tempest, the dull and distant booming of the sea was borne to the affrighted listener's ears. But nothing I could say would begin to give you an idea of the great gale of 1817.

"Well, the old folks sat there as stiff as two statues, listening to every sound. When a big gust tore over the house and shook it till it rocked again, gran'ther would steal a look at grandmother over his specs, but say never a word. The old lady would give a start, let her hands fall idly upon her lap, sit for a moment as if dazed, and then go on with her knitting again as if her very life depended on it.

"Unable at length to control her feelings, grandmother got up out of her chair, with her work in her hand, went to the window, put aside the curtain, and looked out. I say looked out, for of course all was so pitch-dark outside that nothing could be seen, yet there she stood with her white face pressed close to the wet panes, peering out into the night, as if questioning the storm itself of the absent one.

"All at once she drew back from the window with a low cry, saying in a broken voice: 'My God, father, it's Tom in his coffin! They're bringing him up here, to the house.' Then she covered her face with her hands, to shut out the horrid sight.

"'Set down 'Mandy!' sternly commanded the startled old man. 'Don't be making a fool of yourself. Don't ye know tain't no sech a thing what you're sayin'? Set down, I say, this minnit!'

"But no one could ever convince grandmother that she had not actually seen, with her own eyes, her dear boy Tom, the idol of her heart, lying cold in death. To her indeed it was a revelation from the tomb, for the ship in which Tom had sailed was never heard from."

XII

THE DIVINING-ROD

"One point must still be greatly dark,
The reason why they do it."

IT is a matter of common knowledge that certain expert "finders," as they are called, use a divining-rod for detecting underground springs in New England; in Pennsylvania for the locating of oil springs; and in the mineral regions of the Rockies for the discovery of hidden veins of valuable ores. The Cornish miners, also, have long made use of the divining-rod, or "dowsing-rod," as they call it, for a like purpose. A further research, probably, might reveal a similar practice in other countries; but for our purpose it is enough to pre-

sent two of the most intelligent in the world as giving it their sanction and support.

Various implements are employed by the expert operator in his quest for what lies hidden from mortal eyes; but the preferred agent is usually a bough of witch-hazel, branching at one end like the tines of a pitchfork.[1] Taking firm hold of each prong, with the palms of the hands turned upward, the operator slowly walks around the locality where it is desired to find water; and when he reaches the right spot, *presto!* the free end of the bough is bent downward toward the ground as if by some invisible force, sometimes so strongly that the operator is unable to overcome it by putting forth his whole strength. "Dig here," he says, with positive assurance that water will be found not far below the surface of the ground.

On the face of it, this performance comes rather nearer to our idea of a miracle than anything we can now call to mind. Certainly, Moses did no more when he smote the rock of

[1] An apple bough also is made use of in some cases.

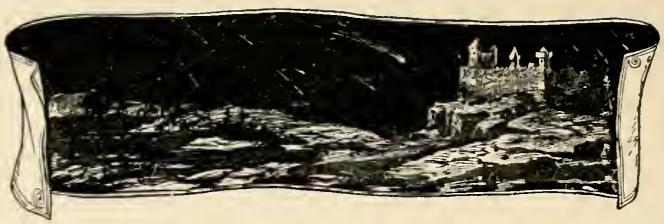
Scripture. Very possibly, former generations of men may have associated the act with the operation of sorcery or magic. An enlightened age, however, accepts neither of these theories. We do not believe in miracles other than those recorded in Scripture; and we have renounced magic and sorcery as too antiquated for intelligent people to consider. Yet things are done every day which would have passed for miracles with our forefathers, without our knowing more than the bare fact that, by means of certain crude agents, obtained from the earth itself, messages are sent from New York to London under the Atlantic Ocean in a few minutes; that the most remote parts of the habitable globe have been brought into practically instantaneous communication, the one with the other; and that public and private conveyances are moving about our thoroughfares without the use of horses or steam. All these things looked to us like miracles, at first, yet custom has brought us to regard them with no more wonder than did the lighting of the first gas

lamp the pedestrian of forty odd years ago. Much as we know, there is probably yet much more that we do not know.

The methods employed in finding oil springs or "leads" of ore are very similar to those made use of in discovering water. It is a fact that some of the most productive wells in the oil regions were located in this manner. It is a further fact, that from time to time, search for buried treasure has been carried on in precisely the same way. Now some astute critics have said that the divining-rod was a humbug, because when they have tried it the mystic bough would not bend for them. It is, however, doubtful if any humbug could have stood the test of so many years without exposure, or what so many witnesses stand ready to affirm the truth of be cavalierly thrust aside as a palpable imposture.

Although I have never seen the operator at work, myself, I have often talked with those who have, whose testimony was both direct and explicit. Moreover, I do know of persons

who continue to ply this trade (for no more than this is claimed for it) in some parts of New England to-day. Whether it should be classed among superstitions may be an open question after all.



XIII

WONDERS OF THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

"The hag is astride
This night for a ride—
The devil and she together." — *Herrick.*

ALL abnormal exhibitions of nature, or in fact any departure from the regular order of things, such as great and unusual storms, earthquakes, eclipses of the sun or moon, the appearance of a comet in the heavens, or of a plague of flies, caterpillars, or locusts were once held to be so many infallible signs of impending calamity. All of our early historians give full and entire credit to the evil import of these startling phenomena, which were invariably referred to the wrath

of an offended deity, only to be appeased by a special season of fasting and prayer. Of course ample warrant exists for such belief in the Bible, which was something no man dared question or gainsay in those primitive days. For example, in his history of Philip's War, Increase Mather lays down this, to our age, startling proposition. "It is," says the learned divine, "a common observation, verified by the experience of many ages, that *great and publick calamityes seldome come upon any place without prodigious warnings to forerun and signify what is to be expected.*" He had just noted the appearance "in the aire," at Plymouth, of something shaped in the perfect form of an Indian bow, which some of the terror-stricken people looked upon as a "prodigious apparition." The learned divine cleverly interpreted it as a favorable omen, however, portending that the Lord would presently "break the bow and spear asunder," thus calming their fears.

This extract taken at random, fairly estab-

lishes the survival of certain forms of superstition in the second generation of colonists. The first, as has been said already, brought all of its old superstitions with it. In short, every form of belief in the supernatural, for which the fathers of New England have been so roundly abused or ridiculed, may be distinctly traced back to the old country.

Very much of the belief in the baleful influence of so-called prodigies, with the possible exception of that ascribed to comets, or "blazing stars," as they were called, has fortunately subsided in a measure, for we shudder to think of a state of things so thoroughly calculated to keep society continually on the rack. But in those earlier times life and death had about equal terrors. Sin and sinners were punished both here and hereafter; and, really, if we may credit such writers as the Rev. William Hubbard and the Mather family, poor New England was quite ripe, in their time, for the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah.

As regards comets, we risk little in saying that a great many very sensible people still view their periodical appearance with fear and trembling, and their departure with a feeling of unfeigned relief. It is our unwilling tribute to the unfathomable and the unknown. And, disguise it as we may, we breathe more freely when the dread visitant has faded from our sight. In the language of Macbeth after seeing Banquo's ghost, —

"Why, so: being gone, I am a man again."

In truth, we know comets as yet only as the accredited agents of destruction. It seems a natural question to ask, If order is nature's first law, why are all these departures from it? Can they be without fixed end, aim, or purpose? Why should the solid earth quake, the sea overwhelm the land, mountains vomit forth flames, the tempest scatter death and destruction abroad, the heavens suspend a winged and flaming monster over us, —

"So horribly to shake our disposition,
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls"?

There was still another form of belief, differing from the first in ascribing supernatural functions to great natural phenomena. In this sense, the storm did not descend in the majesty of its mighty wrath to punish man's wickedness, but, like the roar of artillery which announces the death of the monarch to his mourning people, was coincident, in its coming, with the death of some great personage, which it proclaimed with salvos of Olympus. Indeed, poets and philosophers of keen insight have frequently recognized this sort of curious sympathy in nature with most momentous movements in human life. We are told that the dying hours of Cromwell and Napoleon were signalized by storms of terrific violence, and Shakespeare describes the earth and air as filled with omens before the murders of Julius Cæsar and of King Duncan.

"As busy as the devil in a gale of wind," emphasizes by a robust, sea-seasoned saying the notion current among sailors of how storms arise.

It was just now said that the belief in direct manifestations of the divine wrath, through the medium of such calamitous visitations as great droughts, earthquakes, eclipses, tidal waves, fatal epidemics, and the like, had, in a measure, subsided. The statement should be made, however, with certain qualification; for it is well remembered that during a season of unexampled drought, in the far West, the people were called together in their churches, and on a week-day, too, to pray for rain, just as we are told that the Pilgrim Fathers did, on a like occasion, two hundred and fifty odd years before. Prayers were kept up without intermission during the day. And it is a further coincidence that copious showers did set in within twenty-four hours or so. Even the most sceptical took refuge in silence.

From many different sources we have very detailed accounts of the remarkable dark day of May 19, 1780, with the great fear that phenomenon inspired in those who witnessed it, the general belief being that the Day of Judg-

ment was at hand.[1] In the presence of this overshadowing terror, few retained their usual presence of mind unshaken. One such instance is worth repeating here, if only for its rarity. At that time the Connecticut legislature was in session. The House of Representatives immediately adjourned. A like motion was before the Council. The protest of Colonel Davenport has become historical. Said he, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles may be lighted."

Nearly fifty years later (September, 1825), a similar visitation, due to extensive forest fires in New Brunswick, again created widespread alarm, hardly quieted by the later knowledge of the atmospheric conditions (an under stratum of fog and an upper stratum of smoke) that were so plainly responsible for it. On

[1] According to the prophecy in Joel ii, 10, and Matthew xxiv, 29, then "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light."

the contrary, from what we have been able to gather on the subject, it appears that where the phenomenon was visible, people were quite as ill at ease as their fathers were.

Once again, under almost identical conditions, the same phenomenon wrought exactly the same chaos in the minds of a very large number of people in New England and New York. This has passed into history as the Yellow Tuesday (September 6, 1881). On this occasion the brooding darkness lasted all day. It was noticed that a fire built in the open air burned with a spectral blue flame. Blue flowers were changed to a crimson hue. By two in the afternoon one could not see to read without a light. At a certain hotel in the White Mountains some of the servants were so frightened that they refused to go to work, and fell to praying instead.

These examples at least afford data for a comparison of some little interest, as to how any wide departure from nature's fixed laws has affected the human mind at widely sepa-

rated periods of time, all the theories or demonstrations of science to the contrary notwithstanding.

So much for the effects of what is a reality to be seen and felt by all men. But now and again the mere haphazard predictions of some self-constituted prophet of evil, if plausibly presented and steadily insisted upon, find a multitude of credulous believers among us. It is only a few years since a certain religious sect, notwithstanding repeated failures in the past, with much consequent ridicule, again ventured to fix a day for the second coming of Our Lord. Similarly it falls within the recollection of most of us how a certain self-constituted Canadian seer solemnly predicted the coming of a monster tidal wave, which in its disastrous effects was to be another Deluge. All the great Atlantic seaboard was to be buried in the rush of mighty waters; all its great maritime cities swept away in a moment. Fresher still in the recollection is the prediction that the end of the world would surely

come as the inevitable result of the shower of meteors of November, 1899.

It is a fact that many good and worthy but, alas! too credulous people living along the New England coast, who believed themselves in danger from the destroying tidal wave, were thrown into a state of unspeakable agitation and alarm by this wicked prediction. Yet there was absolutely nothing to warrant it except the unsupported declaration of this one man, whom no one knew, and few had ever heard of. Yet some really believed, more half believed, and some who openly ridiculed the prediction apparently did so more to keep their courage up than from actual unbelief. So easy it is to arouse the fears of a community, who usually act first and reason afterward. I heard of one man who actually packed all his household goods in a wagon, so as to be ready to start off for higher ground upon the first signal of the approach of this much-dreaded rush of waters.

XIV

"SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT"

"*Songe est toujours mensonge*," says a French proverb; "Dreams go by contraries," says the English proverb, — that is, if you dream of the dead you will hear from the living. Who shall decide, where the collective wisdom of centuries is at such wide variance?

To put faith in the supposed revelations of a disordered or overheated brain seems, on the face of it, sheer absurdity, especially when we ourselves may induce dreaming merely by over-indulgence in eating or drinking. Yet there are people who habitually dream when the brain is in its normal condition. This brings

the question down to its simplest form, "What is a dream?" And there we halt.

That there is no end of theories concerning the measure of credit that should be given to dreams is readily accounted for. What nobody can explain every one is at liberty to have his own peculiar notions of. Perhaps the most curious thing about it is the proven fact that so many different people should dream precisely the same thing from time to time; so making it possible not only to classify and analyze dreams, but even to lay down certain interpretations, to be accepted by a multitude of believers. Of course it is easy to laugh at the incoherent fancies that flit through the debatable region we inhabit while asleep, but it is not so easy to explain why we laugh, or why we should dream of persons or events long since passed from our memories, or of other persons or events wholly unknown to us, either in the past or the present.

Without a doubt people dream just as much nowadays as they ever did. That fact being admitted, the problem for us to consider is,

whether the belief in the prophetic character of dreams, held by so many peoples for so many centuries, having the unequivocal sanction, too, of Scripture authority, is really dying out, or continues to hold its old dominion over the minds of poor, fallible mankind. In order to determine this vexed question inquiry was made of several leading booksellers with the following result: Thirty or forty years ago dream books were as much a recognized feature of the bookselling trade as any other sort of literary property; consequently, they were openly exposed for sale in every bookstore, large or small. It now appears that these yellow-covered oracles of fate are still in good demand, mostly by servant girls and factory girls, and, though seldom found in the best bookstores, may be readily had of most dealers in cheap periodicals. This, certainly, would seem to be a gain in the direction of education, though not of the masses. It also appears that, as in the matter of "signs," the female sex is more susceptible to this sort of superstition than is the male; but that by no

means proves the sterner sex to be wholly free from it.

Some persons dream a great deal, others but seldom. Let one who is not much addicted to the habit have a bad dream, a frightful dream, and be he never so well poised, the phantasm can hardly fail of leaving a disquieting, perhaps a lasting, effect. Seldom, indeed, can that person shake off the feeling that the dream forbodes something of a sinister nature. In vain he racks his brain for some interpretation that may set his mind at rest, wholly forgetful of the trite adage that dreams go by contraries.

So often, indeed, do we hear the pregnant declaration, to wit: "Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men see visions," that we have adopted it as a striking rhetorical figure of wide application. In Hamlet's celebrated soliloquy upon the immortality of the soul, the melancholy Dane confesses to an overmastering fear of bad dreams. And once again, as if wrung from the very anguish of his sinful heart, Gloster cries out: "Oh, Catesby, I have

had such horrid dreams!" And Catesby expostulates, "Shadows, my lord, below the soldiers seeming." But Gloster thrusts aside the rebuke as he impetuously exclaims: "Now by my this day's hopes, shadows to-night have struck more terror to the soul of Richard, than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers arm'd all in proof."

We find that our own immediate ancestors were fully as credulous in regard to the importance of dreams, as affecting their lives and fortunes, as the ancients appear to have been. But with them it is true that Scripture warrant was accepted as all-sufficient. Just a few examples will suffice.

In the time of its disintegration, owing to the removal of some of its members to Connecticut, the church of Dorchester, Massachusetts, "did not reorganize on account of certain dreams and visions among the congregation."

Under a certain date, Samuel Sewall sets down the fact that he has had disturbing dreams, which he, according to his wont,

anxiously strives to interpret — he, of all men! — a magistrate, a councillor, and a ruler in the land. One dream was to the effect "that all my [his] children were dead except Sarah, which did distress me sorely with reflections on my omissions of duty towards them as well as breaking of the hopes I had of them."

Shifting now the scene to half a century later, we find in the "Diary and Letters of Sarah Pierpont," wife of the celebrated theologian, Jonathan Edwards, this letter, describing a singularly prophetic dream relative to her grandson, then an infant, Aaron Burr: —

"STOCKBRIDGE, May 10, 1756.

"DEAR BROTHER JAMES: Your letters always do us good, and your last was one of your best. Have you heard of the birth of Esther's second child, at Newark? It was born the sixth of February last, and its parents have named him Aaron Burr, Jr., after his father, the worthy President of the College. I trust the little immortal will grow up to be a good and useful

man. But, somehow, a strange presentiment of evil has hung over my mind of late, and I can hardly rid myself of the impression that that child was born to see trouble.

"You know I don't believe in dreams and visions; but lately I had a sad night of broken sleep, in which the future career of that boy seemed to pass before me. He first appeared as a little child, just beginning to ascend a high hill. Not long after he set out, the two guides who started with him disappeared one after the other. He went on alone, and as the road was open and plain, and as friends met him at every turn, he got along very well. At times he took on the air and bearing of a soldier, and then of a statesman, assuming to lead and control others. As he neared the top of the hill, the way grew more steep and difficult, and his companions became alienated from him, refusing to help him or be led by him. Baffled in his designs, and angered at his ill-success, he began to lay about him with violence, leading some astray, and pulling down others at every

attempt to rise. Soon he himself began to slip and slide down the rough and perilous sides of the hill; now regaining his foothold for a little, then losing it again, until at length he stumbled and fell headlong down, down, into a black and yawning gulf at the base!

"At this, I woke in distress, and was glad enough to find it was only a dream. Now, you may make as much or as little of this as you please. I think the disturbed state of our country, along with my own indifferent health, must have occasioned it. A letter from his mother, to-day, assures me that her little Aaron is a lively, prattlesome fellow, filling his parents' hearts with joy.

"Your loving sister,

"SARAH."

Though "only a dream," this vision of the night prefigured a sad reality, for within two years both of the "guides" had gone, President Burr in September, 1757, his wife in the same month of the next year, 1758.

Passing now down to our own day, the Rev.

Walter Colton, sometime alcalde of Monterey, tells us, in his reminiscences of the gold excitement of 1849, that he dreamed of finding gold at a certain spot, had faith enough in his dream to seek for it in that place, and was rewarded by finding it there.

A mass of similar testimony might be adduced. One piece coming from a brave soldier, who will not be accused of harboring womanish fears, will bear repeating here. We again quote from that most interesting volume, "Forty-one Years in India." Lord Roberts, its author, is speaking of his father, then a man close upon seventy.

"Shortly before his departure an incident occurred which I will relate for the benefit of psychological students; they may perhaps be able to explain it, I never could. My father had some time before issued invitations for a dance which was to take place in two days' time, — on Monday, the 17th October, 1853. On the Saturday morning he appeared disturbed and unhappy, and during breakfast was despondent

— very different from his usual bright and cheery self. On my questioning him as to the cause, he told me he had had an unpleasant dream — one which he had dreamt several times before, and which had always been followed by the death of a near relation. As the day advanced, in spite of my efforts to cheer him, he became more and more depressed, and even said he should like to put off the dance. I dissuaded him from taking this step for the time being; but that night he had the same dream again, and the next morning he insisted on the dance being postponed. It seemed rather absurd to disappoint our friends on account of a dream; there was, however, nothing for it but to carry out my father's wishes, and intimation was accordingly sent to the invited guests. The following morning the post brought news of the sudden death of a half-sister at Lahore, with whom I had stayed on my way to Pashawar."

A man is now living who ran away from the vessel in which he had shipped as a sailor be-

fore the mast, in consequence of dreaming for three nights in succession that the vessel would be lost. All the circumstances were related to me, with much minuteness of detail, by persons quite familiar with them at the time of their occurrence. The vessel was, in fact, cast away, and every one on board drowned, on the very night after she sailed; consequently the warning dream, by means of which the deserter's life was saved, could hardly fail of leaving a deep and lasting impression upon the minds of all who knew the facts. The story has been told more at length elsewhere by the writer,[1] as it came from the lips of a seafaring friend; and the hero of it is still pointed out to sceptics as a living example of the fact that —

"Coming events cast their shadows before."

Richard Mansfield, distinguished actor and playwright, has recently related in an interview a most interesting incident in his own career, which he declared himself wholly unable to account for. So much more credit

[1] In "Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast."

attaches to the testimony of persons if known to the public even by name, that Mr. Mansfield's experience has special value here. It is also a highly interesting fragment of autobiography.

Mr. Mansfield goes on to say that after leading a most precarious existence, in various ways, his discharge from Mr. D'Oyley Carte's company brought on a crisis in his affairs. Reaching his poor lodgings in London, he soon fell into desperate straits, being soon forced to pawn what little he had for the means to keep body and soul together. He declares that he did not know which way to turn, and that the most gloomy forebodings overwhelmed him. We will now let him tell his own story in his own way: —

"This was the condition of affairs when the strange happening to which I have referred befell me. Retiring for the night in a perfectly hopeless frame of mind, I fell into a troubled sleep and dreamed dreams. Finally, toward morning, this apparent fantasy came to

me. I seemed in my disturbed sleep to hear a cab drive up to the door as if in a great hurry. There was a knock, and in my dream I opened the door and found D'Oyley Carte's yellow-haired secretary standing outside. He exclaimed: —

"'Can you pack up and catch the train in ten minutes to rejoin the company?'

"'I can,' was the dreamland reply; there seemed to be a rushing about while I swept a few things into my bag; then the cab door was slammed, and we were off to the station.

"This was all a dream," continued Mr. Mansfield; "but here is the inexplicable denouement. The dream was so vivid and startling that I immediately awoke with a strange, uncanny sensation, and sprang to my feet. It was six o'clock, and only bare and gloomy surroundings met my eye. On a chair rested my travelling bag, and through some impulse which I could not explain at the time and cannot account for now I picked it up and hurriedly swept into it the few articles that had escaped

the pawnshop. It did not take me long to complete my toilet, and then I sat down to think.

"Presently, when I had reached the extreme point of dejection, a cab rattled up, there was a knock, and I opened the door. There stood D'Oyley Carte's secretary, just as I saw him in my dreams. He seemed to be in a great flurry, and cried out: —

"'Can you pack up and reach the station in ten minutes to rejoin the company?'

"'I can,' said I, calmly, pointing to my bag. 'It is all ready, for I was expecting you.'

"The man was a little startled by this seemingly strange remark, but bundled me into the cab without further ado, and we hurried away to the station exactly in accord with my dream. That was the beginning of a long engagement, and, although I have known hard times since, it was the turning-point in my career. I have already said that I have no theories whatever in regard to the matter. I do not account for it. It is enough for me to know that I dreamed certain things which were presently realized in

the exact order of the dream. Having no superstitions, it is impossible to philosophize over the occurrence. All I know is that everything happened just as I have stated it."

Some of the hidden meanings attributed to dreams are elsewhere referred to. As the subject has a literature of its own, we need mention only a few of the more commonly accepted interpretations. Their name is legion.

To dream of a white horse is a certain presage of a death in the family.

To dream of a funeral is a sign that you will soon attend a wedding.

To dream of losing one's teeth is ominous of some coming sorrow.

To dream of a snake is a token that you have an enemy.

Touching a dead body will prevent dreaming of it.

The same dream, occurring three nights in succession, will surely come to pass.

A slice of wedding-cake put under the pillow will cause an unmarried woman to dream of her future husband.

XV

FORTUNE-TELLING, ASTROLOGY, AND PALMISTRY

"I asked her of the way, which she informed me;
Then craved my charity, and bade me hasten
To save a sister." — *Otway.*

ONE noticeable thing about certain forms of superstition is their general acceptance by the public at large, like certain moral evils, which it is felt to be an almost hopeless task to do away with. Other good, easy souls choose to ignore the presence of fortune-tellers,

astrologers, palmists among their daily haunts. As a matter of fact, however, fortune-telling, astrology, and palmistry have become so fully incorporated with the everyday life of all large communities as to excite very little comment from the common run of us.

It certainly would astonish some people if they knew to what an extent these methods of hoodwinking the credulous, or weak-minded, continue to flourish in our large cities, without the least attempt at concealment or disguise. One need only look about him to see the signs of these shrewd charlatans everywhere staring him in the face, or run his eye over the columns of the daily papers to be convinced how far superstition still lives and thrives in the chosen strongholds of modern thought and modern scepticism. At fairs and social gatherings fortune-telling and palmistry have come to be recognized features, either as a means of raising funds for some highly deserving object, of course, or for the sake of the amusement they afford, at the expense of those well-meaning

souls who do not know how to say no. To be sure, it has come to be thoroughly understood that no benevolent object whatsoever has a chance of succeeding nowadays without some sort of nickel-in-the-slot attachment, by which the delusion of getting something for your money is so clumsily kept up.

At fairs, for instance, it is not necessary that the oracle of fortune should speak. Time is saved and modern progress illustrated and enforced by having printed cards ready at hand to be impartially distributed to all applicants on the principle of first come, first served. As the victim receives his card, he laughs nervously, fidgets around a few minutes, goes aside into some quiet corner and furtively reads, "Fortune will be more favorable to you in future than it has been."

Unwittingly, perhaps, yet none the less, has he paid his tribute to superstition, thus thriftily turned to account.

The penny-in-the-slot machines, so often seen in public places, tell fortunes with mechanical

precision, and in the main, impartially, evident care being taken not to render the oracle unpopular by giving out disagreeable or alarming predictions. True, they are just a trifle ambiguous, but does not that feature exactly correspond with the traditional idea of the ancient oracle, which was nothing if not ambiguous? Here is a sample, "You will not become very rich, but be assured you will never want for anything."

Fortune-telling also is openly carried on at all popular summer resorts, with considerable profit to the dealer in prophecies, who is generally an Indian woman. She is much consulted by young women, "just for the fun of the thing." Roving bands of gypsies continue to do a more or less thriving business in the country towns. Character is unfolded or the future foretold by the color of the eyes, the length or breadth of the finger nails or of the eyebrows.

Telling fortunes by means of tea grounds is often practised at social gatherings.

"For still, by some invisible tether
Scandal and tea are linked together."

It is done in this way: When drinking off the tea, the grounds are made to adhere to the sides of the tea-cup, by swiftly twirling it round and round. The cup is then inverted, turned thrice and no more, after which the spell is completed, and the mistress of the revels proceeds to tell the fortunes of those present, with neatness and despatch.

Time has worked certain marked changes in the method of practising this equivocal trade. The modern fortune-teller no longer inhabits a grewsome cavern, reached by a winding path among overhanging rocks, and choked with dank weeds, or goes about muttering to herself in an unknown tongue, or is clothed in rags. Far from it. She either occupies luxurious apartments in the best business section, or in a genteel up-town hotel, or dwells in a fashionable quarter of the town, and dresses *à la mode*. Nor are her clients by any means exclusively drawn from among the

lowly and ignorant, as might be supposed, but more often come from the middle class of society; and, though consultations are had in a private manner, those who ply this trade do so without fear or disguise.

Of the thousand and one matters submitted to the dictum of fortune-tellers, those relating to love affairs or money matters are by much the most numerous. On this head just a few selections, taken at hazard from the advertising columns of a morning newspaper, perhaps will afford the best idea of the nature of the questions most commonly addressed to these disposers and dispensers of fate. One reads, "Mrs Blank: consult her on all business, domestic or love affairs. Unites separated parties." A shrewd offer that! The next, who styles himself "Doctor" is an astrologer. He invites you to send him your sex, with date and hour of birth; or a full description. All matters, he naïvely declares, are alike to him. For the trifling matter of one dollar he promises "a full reading" — presumably of

your horoscope. The next, a trance and business medium, professes to be able to tell the "name of future husband or wife, and all affairs of life." Still another, after setting forth her own abilities in glowing colors, warns a trusting public, after the manner of all quacks, to beware of imitators.

As an indication to what extent these forms of superstition flourish, it would be vastly interesting to know just how many persons there are in the United States, for instance, who get their living by such means. Enough, perhaps, has been said to open the eyes of even the most sceptical on this point. We may add that the modern applicant for foreknowledge is not satisfied with the obscure generalizations of the ancient oracles. He or she demands a full and explicit answer, and will be satisfied with nothing less.

Moll Pitcher, of Lynn, who practised her art in the early part of the century, was the most famous, as she was by far the most successful, fortune-teller of her day. In fact, her reputa-

tion was world-wide, it having been carried to every port and clime by the masters and sailors, who never failed to consult her about the luck of the voyage. Her supposed knowledge of the future was also much drawn upon by the highly respectable owners themselves, who, however, possibly through deference to some secret qualms, generally made their visits at night, sometimes in disguise.[1] Indeed, stories little short of marvellous are told of this cunning woman's skill at divination, or luck at guessing, according as one may choose to look at the matter. Besides being the subject of the poet Whittier's least-known verses, a long forgotten play was written with Moll Pitcher as its heroine, after the manner of Meg Merrilies, in Sir Walter Scott's "Guy Mannering."

From the earliest to the latest times, the astrologers have always claimed for their methods of divination the consideration due to established principles or incontrovertible facts. The

[1] For more about her, see "New England Legends and Folk-Lore."

court astrologer was once quite as much consulted as the court physician. Though fallen from this high estate, and even placed under the ban of the law as a vagabond and charlatan, the astrologer still continues to ply his trade among us with more or less success; and, unless we greatly err, the craft even has an organ, called not too appropriately, "The Sphinx," as the Sphinx has never been known to speak, even in riddles.

Palmistry is the name now given to fortune-telling by means of the hand alone. Formerly there was no such distinction. After looking her client over, the fortune-teller of other days always based her predictions upon a careful scrutiny of the hand. Some careless hit-or-miss reference to the past, at first, such as "you have seen trouble," usually preceded the unravelling of the future. The disciples of palmistry now claim for it something like what was earlier claimed for phrenology and physiognomy. Every one knows that palmistry openly thrives in all large communities as a means of

livelihood. How many practise it in private, no one can pretend to say, but the number is certainly very large. It is a further fact that some surprising guesses at character now and then occur, but we must hold to the opinion that they are still only guesses, nothing more.

DATE DUE

ATTENTION

THIS ITEM DOES NOT CIRCULATE WITHOUT A PHASE BOX OR OTHER PROTECTIVE ENCLOSURE

GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U S A

3 9000 005 927 061